University of Alberta

Well Within the Margins: Prostitutes in Edmonton, 1904-1939

by

Piali Das Gupta ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Well Within the Margins: Prostitutes in Edmonton, 1904-1939 submitted by Piali Das Gupta in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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ABSTRACT

Canadian historical literature on prostitution has tended to accord prostitutes a limited role in their own histories, partly because of the perceived paucity of first-hand accounts from those women. Recently, court records have been shown to be a potentially rich source for the reconstruction of the lives of people whose voices might otherwise be silent. This study uses prostitution-related cases heard at the Supreme Court of Edmonton, Criminal Division, between 1904 and 1939 to explore the conduct of prostitution in Edmonton from the perspective of the prostitute.

After reviewing the historical literature on Canadian prostitution and examining early twentieth-century Edmonton as a setting for the study, the paper proceeds with the creation of a collective profile of the prostitutes. Next it considers how the women and prostitution as a profession fit into Edmonton's social and economic environment. Finally, the study explores prostitutes' own interpretations of their activities and relationships with the world around them.

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INTRODUCTION

> They were by all accounts a very ordinary lot, neither harridans nor courtesans, neither especially attractive nor notably unattractive. They were devoid, in a word, of memorably distinctive qualities of body, mind, or personality.[1]

Popular prairie historian James H. Gray's sweeping and callous dismissal of the early twentieth-century western Canadian prostitute is remarkable, even though prostitutes have never figured prominently in Canadian historiography. Prostitution in Canada is increasingly the subject of scholarly attention, but the image of the prostitute herself remains obscured. This neglect can be directly attributed to the manner in which the study of prostitution in Canada emerged. Historians identified prostitution as an issue which mobilized middle-class women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and made female social activism the focus of their work. As a result, prostitutes were reduced by historians to symbols of vice or victimhood and objects of reform to the middle-class women who were historians' real subjects.

The preoccupation of historians of prostitution in Canada with the social reform movement in the early twentieth century is certainly understandable. Social reform was an expression of the dissatisfaction and uncertainty many Canadians felt

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[1] James H. Gray, Red Lights on the Prairies (Toronto 1971), 34.

when confronted with large-scale changes in their society: urbanization, immigration, and industrialization. Although prostitution had existed in Canada since the earliest days of European settlement,[2] its high visibility in an urban context seemed to substantiate the fears of many middle-class reform groups who "envisioned wholesale social degeneration."[3] Consequently, the issue of prostitution was pushed to the top of the early twentieth-century social and moral agenda. In addition, because women figured prominently as activists within the reform movement, historians used the movement to measure women's influence in spheres where they were not necessarily granted formal power, including law and government. As an issue, then, prostitution presented a paradigm with which to illuminate the mind of the female social reformer, and, it was assumed, Canadian social relations as a whole. The legal dimension of prostitution has also begun to receive historians' attention, but this approach reinforces the objectification of the prostitute. Prostitution is treated as a criminal activity, leaving prostitutes only the roles of criminals and social deviants.

New directions in Canadian history now invite a

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[2] See, for example, André Lachance, "Women and Crime in Canada in the Early Eighteenth Century, 1712-1759," in Crime and Criminal Justice in Europe and Canada, ed. Louis A. Knafla (Waterloo 1985), 156-78.

[3] Linda Kealey, "Introduction," in A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s, ed. Linda Kealey (Toronto 1979), 4.

reconsideration -- or, more accurately, a novel consideration -- of prostitutes as distinct historical actors. Historians have begun to recognize "the importance of diversity in women's experience."[4] Just as the study of the history of women was born out of the recognition that "any portrait of the past" that focuses solely on men is "essentially incomplete and finally inexplicable,"[5] the experiences and consciousness of middle-class women cannot be assumed to be representative of all women in the early twentieth century either. Similarly, the lives of prostitutes can no longer be viewed solely through the testimony or lens of middle-class reformers. The tremendous growth of working class history in Canada over the last two decades also presents a different context within which to understand prostitutes, neither as moral deviants nor as transgressors of formal laws. Instead of being viewed as social outcasts, prostitutes can be accorded a place within a fluid and heterogeneous working-class culture historians are beginning to trace.[6] The history of prostitution as an issue must give way to an understanding

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[4] Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Postmodern Patchwork: Some Recent Trends in the Writing of Women's History in Canada," Canadian Historical Review 72, 4 (1991): 468.

[5] Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, "Introduction," in Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History, ed. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto 1991), 2.

[6] Bryan D. Palmer, Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991 (Toronto 1992), 30-31.

of prostitutes as historical agents.

The perceived absence of first-hand accounts left by Canadian prostitutes has contributed to historians' inordinate reliance on the commentary of early twentieth-century social reformers.[7] Middle-class views of prostitution are certainly not irrelevant to any discussion of prostitutes. In fact, based on their assumptions about such women, reformers were able to effect a number of social and legal changes that had an impact on prostitutes' lives. At the same time, however, reformers were not necessarily acquainted with the real experiences of prostitutes, and it is that inner world that remains to be recovered. Historians have generally employed two different methods when exploring a new avenue of study: tapping unconventional sources and asking different questions of traditional sources. Armed with a fresh approach to a traditional source, the historian can tease out a picture of a world previously overlooked. Prostitutes in early twentieth-century Canada did not leave journals, minutes from meetings, or newspaper articles -- the major sources used to sketch social reformers' views on prostitution. They did, however, literally leave testimony in court records, and their

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[7] This is a weakness that has been identified in the writing of "prostitute history" outside of Canada, as well. Francoise Barret-Durocq, Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London (London 1991), 3, suggests that the "penury of first-hand documents" left by poor women renders historians' accounts of their lives remarkably similar to the findings of the Victorian observers upon whose testimony historians rely.

words provide the historian with an opportunity to reconstruct their lives.

Prostitutes working in Edmonton in the first half of the twentieth century present an ideal case study for the reconfiguration of "prostitute history." A reexamination of prostitution in western Canada is badly needed; James Gray's Red Lights on the Prairies, the first Canadian account of prostitution, remains the only general treatment of prostitution in western Canada, and its conclusions are consequently uncontested. Gray, however, was writing with the image of a frontier society in mind and early twentieth-century Edmonton was no longer a frontier community. In the thirty-five-year span between its incorporation as a city in 1904 and the start of the Second World War in 1939, Edmonton underwent a transformation that had begun on a national scale the previous century. During these four decades, Edmonton grew from a fur trade fort to a frontier settlement, and passed even more quickly to one of western Canada's preeminent urban centres. Given the association of urbanization and industrialization with prostitution in the minds of social reformers, the study of prostitution within the context of Edmonton's crucial growth period allows the historian to gain a better understanding of the connections between prostitution and urban development in Canada. Furthermore, Edmonton possesses a rich set of criminal court records for the period from 1904 to 1939, offering a remarkable opportunity to

produce an account of prostitution from the perspective of the prostitute.

What then do the court records reveal about prostitution in Edmonton? First, they permit the reconstruction of a profile of the city's prostitutes that challenges the stereotypes that emerge from social reform historiography. Furthermore, the patterns in the lives of prostitutes point to the existence of a prostitute "community" in Edmonton. Second, the testimony of these women outlines not only the structure of prostitution in Edmonton, but also the place of the women themselves within a larger population. Prostitutes conducted their lives within the framework of Edmonton's working-class community, laying to rest the notion of marginality too often embraced by Canadian historians of prostitution. Finally, the women offer a fuller picture of social relations and morality in early twentieth-century Canada. Prostitutes in Edmonton had distinct ideas about sexuality, law, criminality and their own position in society. Those ideas demonstrate that social consciousness was hardly as unitary as many historians have assumed. In conclusion, a study of Edmonton prostitutes injects an important new perspective into the discussion of early twentieth-century social history, in the process restoring an essential dimension of humanity to the history of Canadian prostitution.

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL PIMPING: THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE PROSTITUTE IN CANADIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Canadian historical literature on prostitution is, on the whole, a reform-centred body of work. Concerns about, responses to, and regulation of prostitution have represented the major lines of inquiry for Canadian historians since James Gray's Red Lights on the Prairies was first published in 1971.[1] Interest in the study of prostitution also emerged in Britain and the United States in the 1970s, but both British and American historians have eagerly explored new approaches to the study of prostitution since that time. Most notably, they have reconstructed the lives of prostitutes in conjunction with analysing the social contexts within which prostitution was conducted. British scholarship on prostitution benefitted from being directly descended from the work of Michel Foucault whose critical examinations of Victorian moral discourse and sexual behaviour opened alternative (non-reform) views on all aspects of sexuality to historians' scrutiny.[2] American historians soon adopted the British approach. Canadian historians have been slower to recognize the benefits of incorporating the perspective of the

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[1] James H. Gray, Red Lights on the Prairie (Toronto 1971).

[2] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, trans. by Robert Hurley (3 vols.; London 1984).

prostitute into their analyses of prostitution, although recent work on Canadian prostitution shows potential.

Two notable British studies have examined the impact of class and gender on the lives of women whose views on prostitution ranged from recognising it as a way of life to regarding it as an issue of moral concern. Judith Walkowitz's Prostitution and Victorian Society is generally lauded for its interpretation of the relationship between the anti-prostitution campaign in late nineteenth-century Britain and Victorian sexual ideology.[3] The study treats prostitution as an occupation which secured prostitutes an important place within working-class society, and not simply as a criminal activity requiring regulation. One of the most intriguing and useful insights to emerge from Walkowitz's work is its identification of prostitution as one of the complex of subcultures that comprised Victorian culture, each with its own sexual and moral code and set of social relations. In Poverty and Prostitution, her case study of York, Frances Finnegan departs altogether from the standard procedure of highlighting the criminal and moral regulation dimensions of prostitution.[4] Prostitutes, presented as poor women struggling to ameliorate difficult economic and social circumstances, are the central focus of her study. Finnegan recreates the lives

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[3] Judith Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State (Cambridge 1980).

[4] Frances Finnegan, Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York (Cambridge 1979).

of prostitutes by drawing on newspapers, police reports, county court records, poor law application books, and penitentiary documents. In so doing, she demonstrates how historians have exaggerated the dearth of first-hand accounts available from prostitutes, for although her sources are not always written by the women in question, they do present detailed pictures and case histories of individual prostitutes. Sources such as Finnegan's free the historian from undue reliance on the impressionary evidence of contemporary commentators.

With respect to recent American scholarship, most Canadian historians are familiar with Ruth Rosen's The Lost Sisterhood, which follows the profession through the Progressive Era.[5] Using a similar approach to Walkowitz and Finnegan, Rosen tries to capture the lives of prostitutes and the milieux in which they lived, and concludes that prostitutes "played an integral and highly visible role in shaping the character of many urban neighbourhoods."[6] However compelling her conclusions, by attempting to create a "national" history of urban prostitution rather than focusing on specific case studies that examine the conduct of

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[5] Ruth Rosen, The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918 (Baltimore 1982). Another "national" history of American prostitution is Thomas C. Mackey, Red Lights Out: A Legal History of Prostitution, Disorderly Houses and Vice Districts, 1870-1917 (New York 1987), but prostitutes tend to be secondary characters in Mackey's analysis.

[6] Ibid., xiv.

prostitution in particular regional settings, Rosen fails to substantiate her arguments. She ignores the subject of prostitution on the western frontier, for example, presumably assuming that urbanization was not a factor in the American West during the Progressive Era. In contrast, the work of Anne M. Butler demonstrates that prostitution illuminated the tension between an inherited conservative value system and liberalized social relations in the fledgling urban centres that emerged in the American West as early as the late nineteenth century. Butler's Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery also argues that prostitution on the American western frontier has received unfair treatment in historical literature, suffering from an unfortunate romanticization characterized by images like "a cast of glittering 'painted ladies' who move about a noisy crowded bar dispensing earthy fun to a boisterous clientele."[7] Choosing instead to take a critical look at how prostitutes interacted with the rest of society, Butler concludes that prostitutes lived shadowy lives as neither full participants within nor absolute outcasts from American frontier communities. Their lives were defined by their profession and its reception at the hands of clients, the community elite and law enforcement officials.

Considering the state of scholarship on early twentieth-century western Canadian prostitution, Butler's

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[7] Anne M. Butler, Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-90 (Urbana 1985), ix.

reconsideration of prostitution in the American West is particularly important for Canadian historians. Twenty-five years after its publication, James Gray's Red Lights on the Prairies is still the only general treatment of prostitution in western Canada. A popular history, the book is fraught with the romanticism that Butler strives to avoid. Gray's romanticism, however, relates to the young men who sought out prostitutes rather than to the women themselves. "Here, in short," he wrote, championing prairie manhood, "was a male population in the prime of life, glowing with the virility of youth, and in the superb condition which a steady diet of hard work produced."[8] Gray does not claim to present the history of prostitutes; rather, his purpose is to explore "the interaction of alcohol and prostitution on the mores of the times between the start of prairie settlement and the middle of the 1920s."[9] Relying heavily on reports from the local press in seven western Canadian cities, including Edmonton,[10] and oral testimony from men who frequented brothels at the turn of the century, Gray reconstructs the social climate within which prostitution thrived.[11] His pioneering attempt

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[8] Gray, Red Lights, 26.

[9] Ibid., x.

[10] The other cities Gray examines are Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Lethbridge and Drumheller.

[11] The lack of footnoting in Red Lights on the Prairies limits its usefulness to the academic historian. Because Gray often neglects to provide evidence for his conclusions, it is difficult for the reader to accept his findings. Gray also

to understand prostitution within the context of early western Canadian expansion and development deserves recognition. Simply put, Gray argues that brothels and bars became the primary social centres for the young men who were populating the West. The North-West Mounted Police initially tolerated prostitution, but activism on the part of social reformers eventually forced law enforcement officials in all western cities to crack down on the sex trade.

The focus of each chapter on a particular city opens a window to the local dynamics among reform crusaders, law enforcement bodies and the men and women directly involved with prostitution. But Gray's characterization of western Canadian society as a young man's society only reinforces the traditional prairie myth which automatically precludes women from anything but a secondary supporting role. Although he tries to explain women's motivations for becoming prostitutes, he suggests that it would have been impossible for him to

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states at the outset that he used his own "first-hand knowledge of the inside of Winnipeg saloons"(xiii) as another source. Such a use of personal experience is problematic for two reasons. The theoretical angle is addressed by Joan Wallach Scott, "Experience," in Feminists Theorize the Political, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott (New York 1992), 37, who tackles the "unassailability" of personal experience as a historical source. Basically, Scott contends that "experience is at once already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation." Gray, however, does not interpret his memories as the perspective of a young male journalist both trained to observe for particular characteristics of conduct and keen to participate in the environment around him. Rather, he sees himself as an impartial authority. The second problem is a practical one, stemming from the first, because Gray never indicates when he is relying on his own memories to furnish historical background.

investigate prostitutes' stories more fully, "with the secret of their past buried so deeply that no male historian is ever likely to unearth a trace of it."[12] It is not clear, however, why the oral evidence of prostitutes should have been dramatically more difficult to elicit than that of their male clients. After all, Gray solicited the memoirs of former clients simply by placing advertisements in newspapers and guaranteeing respondents' anonymity. Ultimately, while heralded as a popular triumph, Red Lights on the Prairies falls short as a good historical account of Canadian prostitution.

Many of the studies of Canadian prostitution that have emerged since Gray's book was published tackle the subject with more intellectual rigour. Although a few articles appeared in Canadian journals in the 1970s and early 1980s, it has only been the last decade which has seen sustained interest in the history of Canadian prostitution. As previously noted, most Canadian literature on prostitution addresses prostitution as a reform issue and focuses on what the issue represented in the agenda of early twentieth-century social activists and regulators. A second framework of analysis in Canadian prostitute historiography -- which approaches prostitution as work, and often looks at the economic realities that prostitutes faced -- is more useful for gaining an understanding of the prostitute's world. The

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[12] Gray, Red Lights, 41.

best works on the history of Canadian prostitution use an integrative approach to study prostitutes as women. Recognizing that prostitutes' lives were complex and entailed participation in a number of spheres, including work, family and recreation, some historians have tried to synthesize the different images of prostitutes that emerge from each of those spheres into a broader portrait. This approach is also integrative in the way it uses sources, reconstructing prostitutes' lives through first-person accounts balanced by the testimony and reactions of their contemporaries, while keeping the focus on prostitutes themselves, without any stigma as either criminals or deviants. Only in this last category of scholarship does a multi-faceted picture of the prostitute emerge.

The Canadian studies that treat prostitution as a plank of the social reform platform tend to focus more on the social reformers who instigated regulatory action than on the women being regulated. The outstanding work in this area is Mariana Valverde's The Age of Light, Soap and Water.[13] Valverde argues for the symbolic significance of prostitution on the grounds that it represented all the harbingers of social decay reformers feared early twentieth-century Canadian society faced: "loose" morality, public sexuality, and urban licentiousness. Prostitution was thus something that had to

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[13] Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto, 1993).

be controlled, if not eradicated. But Valverde also shows that social purity movements constituted an attempt by the middle class to shape its own conduct and organize its own values, in the face of the tremendous transitions Canadian society was undergoing. However, while her research demonstrates how public response to prostitution served to consolidate a middle-class moral culture, Valverde's work does not offer an understanding of the moral culture of prostitutes and their class.

A different "class" perspective on early twentieth-century Canadian prostitution is presented by Janice Newton, whose socialist activists disagreed with middle-class social reformers but did not necessarily represent prostitutes' own views, either.[14] Newton's subjects are also "reformers" in their own right, labelling prostitution a natural consequence of an unjust capitalist system.[15] Where middle-class activists considered prostitution a moral issue and demanded social reform, socialists sought economic reforms. Identifying prostitutes as young working-class women and their clientele as working-class men, socialists offered a more accurate picture of the profession. But they simultaneously

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[14] Janice Newton, "From Wage Slave to White Slave: The Prostitution Controversy and the Early Canadian Left," in Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics, ed. Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster (Toronto 1989), 217-38; and The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900-1918 (Montreal 1995), 116-31.

[15] Newton, "From Wage Slave to White Slave," 221.

appropriated the vernacular of the social purity movement to describe prostitution as "white slavery." Thus, the historiography of the social regulation of prostitution, whether looking at reformers on the right or the left, discusses the profession as an element of political agenda, but the realities of prostitutes' lives receive little attention.

In contrast, Canadian studies of the medical and legal spheres of reform discussion generally afford more insight into the lives of prostitutes. They also suggest sources that can be more useful for detailed studies of prostitution than the prescriptive literature on which histories of social regulation rely. Jay Cassel's The Secret Plague, an examination of public concern about venereal disease in Canada during the century before the Second World War, reveals that prostitution was considered a health hazard.[16] While not having conducted a detailed survey of prostitutes' medical files, Cassel does offer some insights from his review of their clients' records to suggest that health records are an intriguing source for further study. The men's files, for example, often divulge information about prostitutes' ages, marital status, and involvement in non-prostitution occupations. In general, though, Cassel's analysis uses

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[16] Jay Cassel, The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada, 1838-1939 (Toronto 1987). See also Suzann Buckley and Janice Dickin McGinnis, "Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform in Canada," Canadian Historical Review 63, 3 (1982): 337-54.

points of interaction between prostitutes and health authorities to highlight the concerns of the latter, not the former.

In Recalculating the Wages of Sin, John McLaren takes a similar approach to prostitution in the legal arena.[17] His work shows that the concerns social reformers had about prostitution undeniably translated into activity in the legal sphere. Provisions against sex crimes, in fact, had been evident since the mid-nineteenth century, when appeals to use criminal law to suppress "undesirable conduct" surfaced. But while McLaren's work is certainly helpful in reconstructing the legal environment that prostitutes encountered, his focus on the judiciary maintains the women's position as objects, not subjects, in the historiography of Canadian prostitution. Far more useful is the work of Constance Backhouse.[18] Specifically, Petticoats and Prejudice not only delineates prostitutes' experiences under nineteenth-century Canadian law but also discusses the conduct of those women's lives outside the legal sphere, as revealed by prostitutes' testimony in court records. Backhouse's work provides a glimpse into

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[17] John McLaren, Recalculating the Wages of Sin: The Social and Legal Construction of Prostitution in Canada, 1850-1920 (Winnipeg 1991). See also his "White Slavers: The Reform of Canada's Prostitution Laws and Patterns of Enforcement, 1900-1920," Criminal Justice History 9 (1988), 53-119.

[18] Constance Backhouse, Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada (Toronto 1991). See also her "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminating Society," Social History 36 (1985): 387-423.

relations among prostitutes, the influence of ethnicity in their lives, their motivation for joining the profession, and even a certain degree of awareness of their public status. Joan Sangster has penetrated further into the mental world of prostitutes, using criminal records in early twentieth-century Peterborough, Ontario, to analyze the women's interpretations of their own actions.[19] Significantly, Sangster concludes that prostitutes were aware of the criminal ascriptions and negative moral status assigned to their conduct, and employed clever strategies when pleading their cases in court to justify and validate their behaviour. Clearly, both Backhouse and Sangster demonstrate that legal sources can yield insight into prostitutes' self-consciousness.

Historical literature that approaches prostitution as an occupation in which Canadian women participated also offers opportunities for a fuller appreciation of prostitutes' lives. In fact, some historians insist that, above all, prostitution must be understood as work. In 1993, Philippa Levine called the separation of prostitutes from women labouring in other "physically demanding fields" a pathologizing device, and suggested that historians have not questioned the motives that drove women to prostitution.[20] Lori Rotenburg anticipated

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[19] Joan Sangster, "'Pardon Tales' from Magistrate's Court: Women, Crime and the Court in Peterborough County, 1920-50," Canadian Historical Review 74, 2 (1993): 161-97.

[20] Philippa Levine, "Women and Prostitution: Metaphor, Reality and History," Canadian Journal of History 28, 3 (1993): 480-94.

Levine's concerns by almost two decades when she conducted a Marxist analysis of prostitution in turn-of-the-century Toronto.[21] Rotenburg defined a prostitute as "a service worker who provides her body for use in the sexual act in return for a fee from her clients."[22] Her development of a profile of the Toronto prostitute is particularly useful in attempting to understand who prostitutes were, where they came from, and why they turned to prostitution. Toronto's prostitutes are shown to be unskilled and often immigrant women struggling to survive in the city. Rotenburg's outline of the risks that prostitutes confronted in their profession -- including poverty, vulnerability to pimps, and alcoholism -- makes it clear that the prostitute's work was not without cost to herself. Research that approaches prostitution as work not only impresses upon the literature the economic realities prostitutes faced but may even afford insight into their minds.

Case studies like Rotenburg's offer the best opportunity for gaining an integrated understanding of prostitutes' lives within specific urban contexts. In this respect, local studies of prostitution in western Canadian cities have so far not proven enlightening, mostly because they tend to focus

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[21] Lori Rotenburg, "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century," in Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto 1974), 33-70.

[22] Ibid., 33.

only on the moral reform or regulation aspect of the issue. Relying heavily on Calgary police records, Judy Bedford corroborates James Gray's conclusion about general police tolerance of prostitution in the West.[23] Bedford's work is notable for its identification of the demographic composition of Calgary's prostitute population -- young, Anglo, North American born -- but it offers no glimpse into the minds of the prostitutes. Joy Cooper's examination of prostitution in turn-of-the-century Winnipeg focuses entirely on the responses of city politicians and residents.[24] Likewise, Deborah Nilsen's profile of prostitution in Vancouver fails to deliver any kind of insight into the living conditions of the city's prostitutes.[25] All three case studies present simplistic views of prostitution, derived entirely from the perspectives of social crusaders.

In contrast, both Andrée Lévesque and Judith Fingard not only recreate the local social environments within which prostitution functioned but also penetrates the real conditions of prostitutes' lives. Through the world of the turn-of-the-century Montreal brothel, Lévesque reveals the

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[23] Judy Bedford, "Prostitution in Calgary, 1905-1914," Alberta History 29, 2 (1981): 1-11.

[24] Joy Cooper, "Red Lights of Winnipeg," Transactions of the Manitoba Historical and Scientific Society 29, 3 (1972): 61-74.

[25] Deborah Nilsen, "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-20," in In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C., ed. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (Victoria 1980), 205-28.

lack of control many prostitutes had over their lives because of a hierarchical organization that accorded police, social reformers and madams authority.[26] At the bottom of the hierarchy stood the prostitute, although Lévesque also maintains that conditions varied among houses, including fees for services. Most striking is the fact that 60 to 70 per cent of prostitutes in Montreal's red light district worked in brothels, for despite the harshness of life in them, life on the streets without the protection of a madam was worse. In some houses, a woman might have to serve up to forty clients per night, receiving only a quarter of the proceeds herself. The women in these houses tended to be young and unskilled, often seeking escape from their families or rural life. Lévesque ultimately paints a picture of a hard life of isolation and destitution for Montreal prostitutes. Judith Fingard presents a different take on prostitution altogether. By choosing to deal with four questions relating to prostitution -- "the nature of demand for commercial sex, the sources of supply, the control of prostitution, and the culture of prostitution" -- in Victorian Halifax, Fingard paints the most complete picture of prostitution of Canadian

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[26] Andrée Lévesque, "Le Bordel: Milieu de Travail Controlé," Labour 20 (1987): 13-32. See also her Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939 (Montreal 1994).

historians.[27] The perspectives of clients, reformers, and prostitutes themselves are all integral to her analysis. Most importantly, although Fingard identifies poverty and uncertainty as the major motivations of prostitutes, she does not hold that these conditions or their profession isolated the women. Rather, prostitutes in Victorian Halifax were part of a vibrant social milieu whose constituents were working-class men and women and whose institutions included the tavern and the brothel. Prostitution existed as a natural part of this subculture which was shaped by poverty and relaxed social relations.

Judith Fingard's work is a prime example of the direction that future historical studies of prostitution in Canada should take. Using a range of sources, she has reconstructed a complex social environment within which prostitution flourished. Most importantly, she acknowledges prostitutes as principal actors -- protagonists even -- in a community at large, not ascribing the women to an insular sphere of existence. Fingard contends that the contextualization of the study of prostitution in a specific regional setting affords an opportunity to determine the profession's unique characteristics within a local socioeconomic context. The following study of prostitution in early twentieth-century Edmonton is conducted with this in mind.

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[27] Judith Fingard, The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax (Halifax 1993), 97. See also her Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada (Toronto 1982).

Chapter 2

CITY OF DREAMS AND DIFFICULTIES: A PORTRAIT OF EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY EDMONTON

A pamphlet published by the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce in 1907 proudly proclaimed the

> marvellous progress, the splendid present and the pregnant future of the city of Edmonton and surrounding country. Probably in no other city in the great Canadian West has the old order changed (giving place to the new) so rapidly, so completely and with such little evidence of feverish boom.[1]

The Chamber of Commerce had reason to boast; within the space of a few decades Edmonton had been transformed from a small prairie outpost to a thriving western Canadian metropolis. The small village that was not even connected by telegraph to the nearest established settlement more than eight hundred miles to the east in 1878 even conceived itself as part of a global network of cities fifty years later.[2] While incorporation as a city in 1904 formally marked Edmonton's transition to an ambitious regional centre, the city's economic and social mettle was repeatedly tested over the next thirty-five years -- for the Chamber of Commerce was wrong. Edmonton experienced a series of cycles, with "feverish boom" followed by recession, well into the twentieth century, as it struggled not only to realize the ambitions of its civic

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[1] John F. Gilpin, Century of Enterprise: The History of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce (Edmonton 1988), 50.

[2] W. Everard Edmonds, Edmonton Past and Present: A Brief History (Edmonton 1943), 7, 19.

leaders, but also to fulfil the expectations of the hopeful who thronged to it.

The central factor of Edmonton's growth in the first half of the twentieth century was certainly the extension of transcontinental railways into the city. The arrival of the Canadian Northern Railway in 1905 and the Grand Trunk Pacific in 1909 portended not only population increases and an expansion of economic interests but also an enhanced sense of prestige.[3] Six years after being confirmed as Alberta's capital in 1906, Edmonton amalgamated with the rival community of Strathcona to which it had been connected by a railway bridge over the North Saskatchewan River since 1902. The merger with Strathcona gained Edmonton another symbol of prestige: the University of Alberta, which had been established in 1906. As Edmonton grew in population, economic complexity, and physical size, civic leaders promoted the city as a mecca of opportunity, and were rewarded by the establishment of a remarkable range of commercial enterprise on both sides of the river.[4] Clothing and cigar factories, breweries, stockyards, restaurants, and hotels dotted Edmonton's economic landscape throughout this period. Leading lights of Edmonton's business community over the three decades included Gainer's meat-packing plants, the Hotel Macdonald,

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[3] J.G. MacGregor, Edmonton (Edmonton 1967), 160.

[4] Gilbert Stelter, "What Kind of City is Edmonton?" in Edmonton: The Life of a City, ed. Bob Hesketh and Frances Swyripa (Edmonton 1995), 5.

the Great Western Garment (GWG) factory and Woodward's department store. But economic and physical growth are not the only characteristics of the city's early history. Expansion also had significant social implications. As in other western Canadian cities, Edmonton's population was socially and economically diverse, creating a complex society whose various constituents did not always hold the same interests or share the same experiences.[5]

The railways, the university, the GWG factory, status as the capital of Alberta -- these were perceived as the hallmarks of Edmonton's realized and potential greatness. But Edmonton also constituted quite another city, one whose landmarks included overcrowded shacks without adequate water supplies, beer parlours, and relief offices. Like many prairie cities, Edmonton struggled to provide necessary services like housing and utilities to its burgeoning population throughout its early history.[6] The housing shortage was especially difficult at the turn of the century: in 1907, for example, the Edmonton Bulletin reported that over three thousand people had been forced to find refuge in tents on the

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[5] The most notable study of a western Canadian urban population is Alan F.J. Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914 (Montreal 1975), ch. 8: "Population Growth and Change," 129-47.

[6] Alan F.J. Artibise, "Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities," in Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development, ed. Alan F.J. Artibise (Regina 1981), 223.

outskirts of the city.[7] Periods of economic depression, the most arduous of which was the global Depression of the 1930s, brought with them rates of unemployment so high that, according to the recollections of one city resident, "long lines of hungry, desperate men could be seen outside employment bureaus looking for jobs that weren't there."[8] Living conditions for many Edmontonians were thus often less auspicious than civic leaders might choose to acknowledge: insecure, unsanitary, straitened. The working-class population that emerged in Edmonton as a result of the economic boom following incorporation felt the brunt of the constraints, and there grew, in fact, a "recognizable chasm...between two distinguishable sections of the population."[9]

Edmonton's geographical layout reflected the city's divided social make-up. Owen D. Jones' 1962 survey of Edmonton's historical geography concluded that "residential segregation based on economic factors" was apparent by 1914. The "high-class" neighbourhoods, home to the city's white-collar and managerial classes, were located south of Jasper Avenue and extended westwards. On the north side of Jasper

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[7] Edmonton Bulletin, 20 July 1907.

[8] A.F. Dreger, A Most Diversified Character (Edmonton 1971), 95.

[9] Carl Betke, "The Original City of Edmonton: A Derivative Prairie Urban Community," in The Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History, ed. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise (Ottawa 1984), 395, 399.

Avenue, working-class housing, including both bungalows and shabbily-constructed two-storey buildings that often functioned as rooming houses, stretched north to Norwood Boulevard and east from 105 Street towards 95 Street. Significantly, this area also functioned as the city's central business and industrial district, hosting a major railway station and a variety of smaller enterprises: bakeries, sheet metal shops, printing shops, lumber yards, tanneries, wood yards and liveries, to name a few.[10] Edmonton also continued to expand northward into other industrial-residential territories, formally annexing the "railway hamlet" of Calder in 1917.[11] Jones determined that even though the city grew in size throughout this early period, the city centre maintained its 1914 parameters and remained an "area of mixed housing, industry, and commerce."[12] Nor did annexation of new territories substantially blur the distinctions between working-class and white-collar neighbourhoods. South Edmonton (formerly the town of Strathcona), for instance, had its own subdivisions: professional neighbourhoods like Garneau and Strathcona close to the university and working-class neighbourhoods clustered around the CNR station and stretching

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[10] Owen D. Jones, "The Historical Geography of Edmonton, Alberta" (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1962), 44-78.

[11] MacGregor, Edmonton, 218.

[12] Jones, "Historical Geography of Edmonton," 59.

east into the Bonnie Doon area.[13] At the same time, although South Edmonton was a thriving commercial centre (including coal mines, packing plants, saw mills and Gainer's butcher shop),[14] it did not feature the same juxtaposition of residential, commercial and industrial zones as the central core north of the river.

One of the apparent mysteries of Edmonton's growth is that even during times of economic downturn, the city's population continued to increase. A notable exception to this pattern occurred after the depression of 1913, when the inability of the city to provide economic livelihood for all its residents, combined with the manpower demands of the First World War, prompted the first population decrease in decades.[15] Yet between 1926 and 1931 -- again years of acute economic distress in Edmonton -- the population grew by more than one-fifth.[16] Jobs may have been in short supply, but that did not stop the tide of migration to the city. The 1930s also saw Edmonton's population grow significantly faster than those of other prairie cities, some of which even

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[13] Ibid., 44.

[14] Linda Redekop and Wilfred Gilchrist, Strathcona County: A Brief History (Edmonton 1981), 36.

[15] MacGregor, Edmonton, 214, and Appendix IV: Population. City census figures show that the population had decreased to 53 846 in 1916 from a historical high of 72 516 in 1914.

[16] Census of Canada, 1931.

experienced a decline.[17] The reasons why Edmonton, specifically, experienced an increase are not clear. Paul Voisey contends that the city's automobile-related industries, having been relatively unaffected by the Depression, were still significant employers.[18] Other city residents may also have devised strategies to cope with unemployment that allowed them to remain in the city and in turn employ more people. Catherine Cole, for instance, has shown that some families started their own small businesses, like tailor shops, upon finding that there were no waged jobs to be had.[19] But population increases might also have reflected individual speculation and hope. The possibility that people moved to Edmonton during economic downturns for the same reasons they came during boomtimes must be considered; simply put, people might have gravitated to Edmonton just because they believed that the city promised financial and social opportunities unavailable at home.

There is no doubt that the ranks did swell over four decades. In 1901, Edmonton's population stood at fewer than

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[17] Alan F.J. Artibise, "Continuity and Change: Elites and Prairie Development, 1914-1950," in The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City, ed. Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert Stelter (Toronto 1979), 145.

[18] Paul Voisey, "Unsolved Mysteries of Edmonton's Growth," in Hesketh and Swyripa, Edmonton, 326.

[19] Catherine Cole, "Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton, 1911-1939" (M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1988), 115.

5 000 people.[20] Two decades later, almost 60 000 lived in the city,[21] and on the eve of the Second World War, Edmonton stood poised to crack the 100 000 mark within a few years.[22] In only thirty-five years, Edmonton's population multiplied tenfold, and the city joined the ranks of Canada's ten most populous urban centres.[23] But the sheer volume of migration into Edmonton in the first half of the twentieth century constitutes only part of the picture. By looking at four factors represented in demographic data -- gender, age, ethnicity, and class -- the historian is able to obtain a sense of the city's social composition and environment.

Turn-of-the-century prairie society in western Canada has been characterized as a "young man's society," in which the adventurous yet steadfast spirit of its male homesteaders brought about the successful settlement of the land.[24] Slightly different qualities are emphasized regarding the construction of prairie cities, which are seen as wilder, more unstable than their eastern counterparts and fraught with

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[20] Census of Canada, 1901.

[21] Census of Canada, 1921.

[22] MacGregor, Edmonton, 113. The figure of 90 000 is the author's estimate, interpolated from official federal censuses for 1936 and 1941, when Edmonton's population was 85 774 and 93 817, respectively.

[23] Alan F.J. Artibise, "The Urban West: The Evolution of Prairie Towns and Cities to 1930," in Stelter and Artibise, The Canadian City, 154.

[24] Joanne A. Stiles, "Descended from Heroes: The Frontier Myth in Rural Alberta," Alberta 2, 2 (1988): 30-31.

tension because of the preponderance of men.[25] Carl Betke, for example, states that in Edmonton the "stability suggested by the presence of equal numbers of males and females was replaced by the frontier condition indicated by a clear majority of men over women."[26] But the relative brevity of this "frontier condition" must be recognized. While statistics for the first decade of Edmonton's history certainly indicate a higher proportion of men, women hardly formed a numerically insignificant segment of the population during this time. In fact, although in 1906 Edmonton was 60 per cent male, and a decade later the city's male population had quadrupled, it was really the city's female demographics that were undergoing transformation. The same ten-year period just discussed in reference to the male population saw a sixfold increase in the number of women living in Edmonton, from 4 515 to 26 384. Proportionately, the female population was growing faster, and in 1926 women outnumbered men in the city for the first time in its history. These women also tended to be young, from 15 to 34 years old. Most importantly, throughout most of the early twentieth century, young women comprised anywhere from 15 to 20 per cent of the city's total population.[27] Clearly, Edmonton could also be

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[25] Gray, Red Lights, x.

[26] Betke, "The Original City of Edmonton," 394.

[27] Census of Canada, 1921, 1931; Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1926, 1936. The number of women in Edmonton rose from 29 212 in 1921 to 43 139 in 1936. Out of that increase

considered a "young woman's society."

Census figures also indicate that both Edmonton's total population and its female component had predominantly English-speaking, Anglo backgrounds, including both the British-born and Americans, as well as migrants from eastern and central Canada. All three groups were certainly represented in Edmonton, although the proportion of central Canadian migrants decreased significantly as the century progressed. In 1911, for instance, almost half of Canadian-born Edmonton residents listed their birthplace as Ontario.[28] By 1931, that figure stood at one-fifth.[29] The presence of prairie-born women in Edmonton simultaneously experienced an astonishing increase; whereas in 1911 the number of Ontario-born women outnumbered those from all three prairie provinces combined, by 1931 more than 70 per cent of all women in Edmonton had been born in western Canada, the majority in Alberta.[30] The transition to a prairie-born population did not change the ethnic

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of 13 927, over forty per cent were women aged 15 to 34.

[28] Census of Canada, 1911. Out of Edmonton's 12 475 Canadian-born residents, 5 868 were born in Ontario.

[29] Census of Canada, 1931. Out of Edmonton's 46 562 Canadian-born residents, 9 246 listed Ontario as their birthplace.

[30] Census of Canada, 1911 and 1931. For 1911, the figures for women from these provinces were as follows: 2 647 from Ontario, 1 754 from Alberta, 449 from Saskatchewan, and 349 from Manitoba. Canadian-born women numbered 5 848 overall. Out of 24 061 Canadian-born women in 1931, 14 716 were from Alberta, 4 629 from Ontario, 1 313 from Saskatchewan, and 1 142 from Manitoba.

demographics substantially, however. The proportion of people claiming British ethnic origin in Edmonton averaged between 75 and 80 per cent of the general population throughout this period, and the female subgroup had even greater numbers, reaching a high of 86 per cent in 1936.[31] The French, the Germans, and later the Ukrainians constituted the city's largest ethnic minority groups,[32] but because these groups were relatively small and tended to form culturally insular communities,[33] Edmonton was essentially an Anglo city.

Edmonton also had a sizeable working-class population throughout this period. In 1911, for instance, more than one-half of all working adults were engaged in four particular sectors: building trades, manufacturing and mining, domestic and personal service, and transportation.[34] By 1931, one-quarter of all labour was concentrated in trade and clerical jobs, although the four occupations listed above were still well-represented.[35] The opportunities for women in Edmonton's labour force were more narrow. In 1911, fully 1 139 of the city's 1 871 working women were engaged in two occupational

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[31] Census of Canada, 1911, 1921, 1931, and 1936. Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1906, 1916 and 1926.

[32] Stelter, "What Kind of City is Edmonton?" 10.

[33] Howard Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta (Toronto 1982), 74-75.

[34] Census of Canada, 1911. Out of 11 407 working adults, 6 240 were in those four areas.

[35] Census of Canada, 1931. Over 8 000 of Edmonton's 31 000 working adults were in trade and service occupations.

fields: domestic and personal service, and the manufacturing industry.[36] By 1931, clerical and trade occupations had augmented women's options, but the majority of jobs held by women continued to be in personal service.[37]

Thus, the picture of early twentieth-century Edmonton that emerges is one of a predominantly Anglo, generally young populace within which the proportion of women was consistently on the increase. The presence of this intriguing group of women raises a number of questions that invite further exploration. What were the conditions of the lives of these women? How were they received in Edmonton? What were the implications of the presence of a relatively substantial community of young women for the city's growth? As noted, many women in Edmonton worked, but their jobs tended to be low-paying, dreary, and unskilled or semi-skilled -- as domestic servants, hotel and boarding house chambermaids, factory workers, housekeepers. In an industry like garment manufacturing, women occupied the bulk of the least remunerative positions. Where men were able to obtain employment as managers, salesmen, shipping clerks, cutters, and machinists, women, for the most part, could only work as

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[36] Census of Canada, 1911.

[37] Census of Canada, 1931. Out of 7 236 adult working women, 2 417 were in domestic or personal service, 1 935 in clerical work, 708 in trade and 426 in the manufacturing industry.

sewing machine operators, a job which paid quite poorly.[38] Figures for 1925 show that the average weekly pay for adult women in Edmonton's garment manufacturing industry was $15.14 compared to $23.29 for adult men, and the situation was even worse for girls under eighteen years of age, who took home only $9.55.[39] In addition to low pay, women in all occupations had to contend with long hours, repetitive labour, job insecurity, sexual harassment and unhealthy physical environments[40] -- but despite the difficulties of working life, most had no choice but to stay in the paid labour force.

Across Canada, women's organizations recognized that female participation in the labour force was a new reality, and mobilized on behalf of working women under the rubric of social reform. The early twentieth-century reform movement articulated the concerns and aspirations of many Canadians (particularly those from the middle class) regarding a variety of social and moral issues: suffrage, temperance, divorce, education, and sexuality, to name a few. Not all of these concerns were common to all Canadians (even within the middle class) or all reform organizations, but each represented an attempt to understand and organize a society undergoing

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[38] Catherine Cole, "Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton," in Hesketh and Swyripa, Edmonton, 164.

[39] Ibid., 167.

[40] Rebecca Priegert Coulter, "Between School and Marriage: A Case Study Approach to Young Women's Work in Early Twentieth-Century Canada," History of Education Review 18, 2 (1989): 29.

transition.[41] The issue of women and work had initially attracted attention in the late nineteenth-century with the emergence of an industrial female labour force in eastern and central Canada, and became a truly national preoccupation once the cities of the West started to witness the same process.

Edmonton occupies something of a special place in the history of social reform, because the city was home to two of the movement's most acclaimed leaders: Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy. These two women helped to spearhead a number of important changes, and it was in great part due to their efforts, that Canadian women were entitled to receive a share of the common property in a marriage, to vote in national elections, and to be recognized as "persons" eligible to sit in the Senate.[42] Both McClung and Murphy were, however, also active in social reform on a local level in Edmonton, working within or with many of the city's major women's organizations.

It was only in the first decade of the twentieth century that reform work began to flourish in Edmonton, as a host of

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[41] Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto 1991), Ch. 1: "Introduction," 15-33.

[42] While critically-balanced biographies of Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy have yet to be written, there are a number of good reviews of their personal lives and accomplishments. See Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Ever a Crusader': Nellie McClung, First-Wave Feminist," in Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History, 2d ed., ed. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto 1991), 308-21; and Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis, Firing the Heather: The Life and Times of Nellie McClung (Saskatoon 1993); and Christine Mander, Emily Murphy: Rebel (Toronto 1985).

groups with both overlapping and complementary aims and membership indulged in their specific preoccupations. With respect to working women, concerns were really of two natures, one sympathetic to the plight of individuals, the other vigilant about the social and moral environment of the city and its potential effect on the behaviour of those women. As a result, the efforts of local groups took a number of directions. The Local Council of Women, for instance, monitored women's employment situations carefully, reporting increases in female unemployment and advocating an increased minimum wage.[43] The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) petitioned for the establishment of safe housing for homeless and foreign girls, arguing that it was improper for them to be working in hotels.[44] From its inception in Edmonton in 1907, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was even more active in the protection of young women. Its projects ranged from meeting incoming girls at local train stations in order to direct them to safe shelter to launching a building campaign in 1920 so that such women could be housed (and their behaviour essentially monitored) until they found suitable employment.[45] The YWCA was not the only organization

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[43] Coulter, "The Working Young of Edmonton," 153.

[44] Elise Schneider, "Addressing the Issues: Two Women's Groups in Edmonton, 1905-1916," Alberta History 36, 3 (1988): 17.

[45] Young Women's Christian Association, First Fifty Years: Edmonton YWCA 1907-1957 (Edmonton 1957), 7 and 21.

to establish regulated housing for women; the Methodist Woman's Missionary Society (WMS) considered their Ruthenian Girls' Home an important haven from and frontline of defence against the unhealthy moral environment of the city. Set up to provide housing for Ukrainian girls arriving in Edmonton from rural farming areas, the Home also trained its residents to become domestic servants, an ostensible way to deter them from engaging in "urban temptations and vices."[46] The centrality of invigilating urban morality in the activities of Edmonton's reform groups cannot be emphasized enough. As Carolyn Strange has noted about women's groups in turn-of-the-century Toronto, implicit in all of the organizational rhetoric concerning women and work "was a subtext (or perhaps the metatext) of prostitution."[47]

The connection between women's working and living conditions and immoral behaviour was made explicit in the minds of many Edmontonians in February 1929, when the Edmonton Journal featured the case of a fifteen-year-old prostitute in several successive issues. Identifying the girl as Miss X, the newspaper reported that she had arrived in Edmonton when she was fourteen, in search of work. Although she eventually found a job at Ramsey's Department Store, it paid only $7.50

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[46] Frances Swyripa, Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991 (Toronto 1993), 93.

[47] Carolyn Strange, Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930 (Toronto 1995), 10.

a week, "not sufficient to pay her board, let alone buy clothes." Walking around the city one day, Miss X met a taxi driver who asked her to go for a ride. The driver became her first pimp, but he eventually passed her on to his friends and the girl found herself working for a number of men. Miss X's story confirmed the worst fears of local women's groups: a vulnerable young girl in the city, unable to support herself on the wages of her gainful employment, taken in by the guile of "designing men."[48]

This girl's story also highlighted reform concerns about the sexual danger of the city. Social interaction was difficult to regulate in large, anonymous urban centres, and young women like Miss X often came into contact with members of the opposite sex without the protection and filter of family or community scrutiny. The working conditions of young women engendered a certain amount of sympathy from middle-class women's organizations -- the YWCA, for instance, called them a "noble army of unattached women employed in Edmonton."[49] At the same time, the avid participation of those same women in Edmonton's social scene, including the mixed-sex venues presented by bars, theatres and smoke-filled dance halls, was regarded with deep suspicion and distaste. As early as 1919, the YWCA warned of the need for the city to

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[48] Edmonton Journal, 4 February 1929.

[49] Young Women's Christian Association, First Fifty Years: Edmonton YWCA, 1907-1957 (Edmonton 1957), 7.

provide "some places of recreation...to counteract the attraction of undesirable places of amusements," which would remove much of the need for rescue work.[50] Earlier still, in 1910, a coalition of sixteen women's organizations called for the censorship of all plays and moving pictures in the city, because they could be harmful to the morals of those who watched them.[51] The presumed liberal social environment of the Canadian city was blamed for fostering conditions that led to moral delinquency, prompting reform groups to conclude that the whole urban sphere, in addition to the behaviour of individual men and women, needed to be regulated. One interesting solution to the perceived unhealthy moral environment appeared in 1913, when Annie M. Jackson was appointed Edmonton's first female police officer, charged with reducing "the tendency of Edmonton's young girls to engage in hoydenish conduct."[52] Despite the efforts of some urban reformers to translate concerns about female delinquency into action in the legal arena, however, the issue of prostitution enjoyed an ambiguous relationship with law enforcement throughout early twentieth-century Canada.

The laws about prostitution were clear. The Criminal Code of Canada of 1892 contained two groups of provisions

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[50] Edmonton Journal, 8 February 1919.

[51] Edmonton Journal, 28 October 1910.

[52] Edmonton Police Department, Pride in the Past, 1894-1982 (Edmonton 1982), 8.

regarding prostitution. Vagrancy provisions -- including street-walking, being an inmate or frequenter of a disorderly house and living on the avails of prostitution -- were long-standing, while a new "nuisance" offence prohibited the keeping of a common bawdy house.[53] But, as John McLaren has argued, the police had a wide range of discretionary powers and the actual enforcement of laws often depended on public pressure.[54] Emphasis on law enforcement in Edmonton seemed to occur in waves at turn of the century, indicating that prostitution was never in the public eye in any sustained way. Although James Gray suggests that the profession was "a part of the social fabric of Alberta cities and towns from the earliest settlement," and thus escaped the vigilance of police and settlers alike,[55] it could equally be argued that even early settlers tried to contain prostitution. For example, although brothels existed with the tacit approval of Edmonton's inhabitants in the late nineteenth century, there was also an informal understanding that such houses were to be isolated from the rest of the community.[56] Moreover, by 1906, brothels no longer necessarily enjoyed even informal sanction;

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[53] Criminal Code of Canada, S.C., 1892, c.29, s.207.

[54] John McLaren, "The Canadian Magistracy and the Anti-White Slavery Campaign 1900-1920," in Canadian Perspectives on Law and Society: Issues in Legal History, ed. W. Pue and B. Wright (Ottawa 1988), 330.

[55] Gray, Red Lights, 124.

[56] Frank W. Anderson, Sheriffs and Outlaws of Western Canada (Calgary 1973), 48.

in February of that year, a petition to extend the city's limits was circulated so that a nuisance in the form of a "house of ill fame" on the outskirts could be eliminated.[57] The idea that western Canadians, in particular, approached prostitution with equanimity is, in fact, another prairie myth. Studies of prostitution in other Canadian cities demonstrate that tolerance was a common response on the part of urban residents until reform rhetoric captured public imagination.[58]

In Edmonton, the tolerance of prostitution by police officers was sharply called into question in the 1910s, when an official inquiry was conducted into the activities of the Edmonton Police Department. James Gray has outlined the controversy in detail. Edmontonians had begun to question the ability of their local police to keep the city clean of vice early in the decade, stirred by a report in the Edmonton Journal that the madam of a brothel was tipped off about an intended raid by a police officer. In 1912, Silas Carpenter replaced the retiring A.C. Lancey as police chief and arrests on prostitution-related charges jumped, reflecting Carpenter's

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[57] City of Edmonton Archives (hereafter CEA), MS 209 F173, City Commissioner's Papers, letter from Major W. Beale, Chief of Police, Edmonton Police Department to the Mayor, 1 Feb 1906.

[58] See, for example, Judith Fingard, Dark Side of Life (Halifax 1993), 96. Fingard contends that "a sustained attack on prostitution did not characterize Halifax society" until the 1890s when reformers began to clamp down more stridently on the activities of the working class in general.

intention to "clean up the city." Two years later, ostensibly concerned about social conditions in Edmonton, Mayor W.J. McNamara fired Carpenter and asked Lancey to resume the position. According to Gray, many of the prostitutes who had left town during Carpenter's tenure returned after his firing, because rather than complete eradication, Lancey advocated "controlled" prostitution. After several botched and abortive raids of disorderly houses, however, Lancey was again fired. Justice D.C. Scott concluded in an ensuing inquiry into the Police Department, that after Carpenter's firing, Edmonton had been turned into a "wide-open city" for crime. Carpenter was not reinstated, though, and prostitution continued to function in Edmonton.[59] Concerns about the police surfaced intermittently thereafter, most notably in 1919 when the Woman's Christian Temperance Union called in vain for the reorganization of the whole police force the better to enforce the liquor regulations under prohibition,[60] but no sustained campaign to pressure law enforcement officials ever materialized.

Assuming that reformers were correct in their assessment of the laxity of policing in Edmonton, there is still a need to explain why police officers on the prairies were not vigilant in their enforcement of clear laws against prostitution. Several explanations have been offered. S.W.

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[59] Gray, Red Lights, 137-44.

[60] Gilpin, Edmonton, 135.

Horrall argues that the Royal North-West Mounted Police considered prostitution a "necessary evil" in the early days of settlement in the West,[61] but it is not clear if the Edmonton Police Department subscribed to the same philosophy. After the situation of teenaged prostitute Miss X caught the public eye in 1929, the police themselves suggested that it was difficult to monitor the trade without establishing an official red light district in the city.[62] No in-depth study of the police in Edmonton exists, but given the similarities in composition throughout Canada at the time, the experiences of the Police Department in Hamilton, Ontario could shed light into the mental world of police in general. John C. Weaver contends that although Hamilton city police were called upon by reformers to enforce moral order, the policemen themselves came from working-class origins which made them inconsistent enforcers of middle-class morality.[63] Moreover, police "may have been indifferent or even hostile to measures that forced them to look for trouble among folk of their own class

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[61] S.W. Horrall, "The (Royal) North-West Mounted Police and Prostitution on the Canadian Prairies," Prairie Forum 10, 1 (1985): 106.

[62] Edmonton Journal, 6 February 1929.

[63] John C. Weaver, "Social Control, Martial Conformity, and Community Entanglement: The Varied Beat of the Hamilton Police, 1895-1920," Urban History Review 19, 1-2 (1990), 113-27.

background."[64]

When the police failed to enforce moral order to the satisfaction of local reformers, higher expectations were imposed upon the court system.[65] John McLaren has demonstrated that between 1850 and 1920 more "vocal and effective appeals to use the law, especially the criminal law, to suppress a wide range of conduct" were being expressed in Canada.[66] He identifies the 1910s as a particularly acute time of mobilization. Public pressure during this decade to contain prostitution led in 1916 to the appointment of Emily Murphy as the first female police magistrate in the British Empire, assigned to preside over a women's police court in the city.[67] Local women's organizations in the city had argued that male courtrooms were counter-productive in terms of inducing female criminals to reform their behaviour, as the women found it demoralizing to be tried in front of men.[68]

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[64] John C. Weaver, Crimes, Constables and Courts: Order and Transgression in a Canadian City 1816-1970 (Montreal 1995), 114.

[65] A study of the encounter of social and moral concerns in Calgary's police court is offered by Thomas Thorner and Neil B. Watson, "Keeper of the King's Peace: Colonel G.E. Sanders and the Calgary Police Magistrate's Court, 1911-32," Urban History Review 12, 3 (1984): 45-55.

[66] John McLaren, Recalculating the Wages of Sin: The Social and Legal Construction of Prostitution in Canada, 1850-1920 (Winnipeg 1991), 1.

[67] Christine Mander, Emily Murphy: Rebel (Toronto 1985), 78-92.

[68] Faye Reineberg Holt, "Magistrate Emily Ferguson Murphy," in Hesketh and Swyripa, Edmonton, 144.

There is evidence that female magistrates differed from their male colleagues in reference to female crime. Emily Murphy, who served on the bench until 1931, took a particular interest in the personal situations of the prostitutes who came before her.[69] She felt it important to impress upon the provincial deputy attorney-general that her court did not just impose fines but was actively engaged in the business of "reclamation and conservation." She also noted with pride that one of the prostitutes she had sentenced took a job Murphy secured for her with the Canadian Pacific Railway out of town, and was anticipating a reconciliation with her husband.[70] In contrast, Colonel G.E. Sanders, who presided over Calgary's police court, did not extend his involvement with female defendants beyond sentencing.[71] Though Murphy had little compunction about giving harsh sentences to recidivist prostitutes, she believed that the economic and social exploitation which working-class women faced contributed not only to the initial delinquency of female criminals but also to patterns of recidivism. In a letter to the Calgary chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, for example, she lamented that impositions of fines on prostitutes effectively

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[69] McLaren, "The Canadian Magistracy," 345.

[70] Provincial Archives of Alberta (hereafter PAA), 69.712/2670, Emily Murphy Magisterial Papers, letter to Deputy Attorney-General A.G. Browning from Police Magistrate Emily Murphy, 5 May 1917.

[71] Thorner and Watson, "Keeper of the King's Peace," 48.

forced greater economic constraints on the women."[72] Murphy's understanding of one aspect of the economic exploitation is plain: "No matter how keenly a girl may feel her shame; no matter how much she desires to do better after the sad experience of the cells and the dock, she often finds this impossible because of her strangling debt."[73] It is not clear if Murphy's male colleagues came to share her views on prostitution and female crime. Although the "reformative spirit" in Canadian courts in general greatly diminished after 1920, the earlier part of the century did constitute a period of time when the application of the law was influenced by social reform perceptions of prostitution. Records from the courtrooms of Edmonton, for one, demonstrate the zeal of a reformer like Emily Murphy for "improving" the lives of the female criminals who came before her.

The present case study of prostitution in Edmonton uses those same court records to gain an understanding of the behaviour and attitudes of prostitutes themselves. Court records have recently emerged as one of the richest sources for reconstructing the lives of people who otherwise might not have left first-hand accounts of their thoughts and activities in other, more voluntary forms. Constance Backhouse, for instance, uses legal records "to provide vivid snapshots of the conditions under which women struggled, rebelled and

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[72] CEA, Emily Murphy Magisterial Papers, M62 F22.

[73] Ibid.

eventually accommodated themselves."[74] Joan Sangster has recently demonstrated that the courts were a forum within which female criminals were able to offer interpretations of their own behaviour, reflective of their understanding of both social mores and their personal situations.[75] Furthermore, in that court records document a moment of public encounter for prostitutes, they furnish a crucial and unique view into their side of the confrontation.

Court records are not without limitations as a source for the study of prostitution, however. Because not all prostitutes fell afoul of the law, and because there is no way to assess how many evaded the criminal justice system, historians cannot say conclusively how typical specific cases are of the general conditions of prostitutes' lives. There is also the frustration of having access to a moment in a woman's life, or even several moments, without being able to follow future developments. The stories, not just the records, are incomplete. The key to accurately assessing the value of court records as a source for the study of prostitutes is to treat their contents as illuminative and not necessarily representative or definitive. Andrée Lévesque advises a cautious decoding of the "precious scraps" left by

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[74] Constance Backhouse, Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada (Toronto 1991), 7.

[75] Joan Sangster, "'Pardon Tales' from Magistrate's Court: Women, Crime and the Court in Peterborough County, 1920-50," Canadian Historical Review 74, 2 (1993): 161-62.

prostitutes,[76] but, in fact, all historical sources require judicious handling and careful interpretation. The accuracy and reliability of prostitutes' testimony could be called into question if the women doctored the truth about their activities and intentions in order to protect themselves or their pimps. Yet the fact that the tales that these women told often might have been "justifications, strategies, and interpretations"[77] gives them even greater value in terms of insight into the minds of prostitutes. As Frances Swyripa has argued:

> Regardless of...[their] limitations, the sworn statements and testimony of the principals in a case...registered what people either believed was the truth or wanted to have believed was the truth, and thus how they ordered and perceived their world.[78]

Moreover, a number of patterns do emerge from the documents, giving credibility to the accounts of individual women, and revealing the similarities and differences among prostitute populations across Canada.

This study uses prostitution-related cases heard at the Supreme Court of Edmonton, Criminal Division, between 1904 and

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[76] Andrée Lévesque, Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939 (Montreal 1994), 17.

[77] Sangster, "'Pardon Tales'," 197.

[78] Frances Swyripa, "Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Ukrainian Bloc Settlement: East-Central Alberta Between the Wars," Prairie Forum 20, 2 (1995): 151.

1939 to explore different aspects of prostitutes' lives.[79] The most complete individual case files contain an outline of the charge, the conviction and the ensuing penalty, as well as depositions from witnesses. Most files do not contain statements from the women or indeed any testimony at all, and they naturally prove less illuminating. Other files have only the charge sheet. Altogether, 487 prostitution-related cases came before the court, including charges of keeping a common bawdy house, being an inmate or a frequenter of a bawdy house, prostitution, procuring, vagrancy, and living on the avails of prostitution. While the 158 male defendants comprise almost one-third of the total sample, it is the women who were brought before the courts and their testimony who are of particular interest here. Strikingly, the testimony of women was most revealing when they were witnesses in the trials of their male pimps,[80] rather than when they faced charges of their own. When prostitutes did testify, they spoke volumes. They were asked, and volunteered answers to, all kinds of personal questions, from their ages to what type of sexual education they had received from their mothers. In essence,

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[79] The PAA has organized its inventory of Supreme Court criminal records into three sections: the Old, Middle and New Series, all accessional under 83.1. The Old Series covers all cases heard at the court from 1881 to mid-1919; the Middle Series extends from mid-1919 to mid-1935, when the New Series begins.

[80] This case study will use the words "pimps" and "procurers" interchangeably. While the latter was the legal term, both were part of common vernacular of the early twentieth-century.

they were asked in court the types of questions which fascinate the social historian.

In the pages that follow the information emerging from the court files is organized around three issues: the background of Edmonton prostitutes, the existence of a female subcommunity within an Edmonton working-class community, and the characteristics of a social consciousness among prostitutes. Simply put, the first task is to create a collective profile around who the prostitutes were, their points of origin, and their reasons for being in Edmonton. The second is to determine how prostitutes as women and prostitution as a profession fit into Edmonton's social and economic environment. Finally, the records will be used to explore prostitutes' own interpretations of their activities and relationships with the world around them. Ultimately, these women contributed to the complexity of life in early twentieth-century Edmonton, including its moral and social preoccupations.

Chapter 3

YOUNG, MOBILE, ANGLO -- AND MARRIED?: A PROFILE OF THE EDMONTON PROSTITUTE

The development of an accurate collective portrait of Edmonton's early prostitute community is crucial for two reasons. One is to gain a better understanding of the internal dynamics of prostitution. James Gray has discussed prairie prostitution as an industry fed by the sexual demands of men.[1] His portrait of those men is well-developed, if admittedly romantic. Gray's migrant, sexually-deprived young men, however, did not comprise the prostitute population. Prostitution's "sources of supply"[2] were women, and the backgrounds and circumstances of those women are necessary to explain the growth and conduct of the profession. A general collective profile of Edmonton prostitutes, then, allows the historian to identify patterns in the women's lives which led them to prostitution in the first place. The second reason for developing an accurate picture of the prostitutes working in early Edmonton is that such a profile reveals characteristics that distinguished Edmonton's prostitute community from those in other contemporary Canadian cities. This differentiation is particularly important in a western

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[1] James H. Gray, Red Lights on the Prairies (Toronto 1971), 16-23.

[2] Judith Fingard, The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax (Halifax 1993), 97.

Canadian context, where historians have been guilty of allowing generalizations about prostitutes to stand untested. Four major facets of prostitutes' identities -- geographical origin, ethnic background, marital status and family circumstances, and class setting -- paint a picture of this group of women. While each story is unique, there is also a remarkable amount of consensus among the accounts, and definite patterns emerge.

Early twentieth-century commentators clearly demonstrated a preoccupation with the origins of prostitutes in the city. In 1929, Mrs. J.C. Bowen, president of the Edmonton Young Women's Christian Association expressed concern that the welfare of "newcomers" to the city was not being adequately watched and that measures were required to "snatch" girls from the "hands of designing men."[3] The testimony of prostitutes in the court records indicates that the connection between migration of women to the city and prostitution was indeed well-founded. Over 80 per cent of the prostitutes represented in the sample had moved to the city from rural areas and towns and villages around the prairies. The names of the localities toll through the records -- Tofield, Junkins, Gwynne, Ponoka, Metiskaw, Lac La Nonne, Egremont, Lloydminster.

Personal agency is clearly illustrated by the tremendous mobility of Edmonton's prostitutes. Many women, for instance, came to Edmonton by way of another western Canadian city. In

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[3] Edmonton Journal, 7 February 1929.

fact, several prostitutes cite stops in a number of different points. While Calgary was the most common city of last residence, Saskatoon and Winnipeg also figure prominently. Marie M's experience was similar to that of many prostitutes; in her own words, she had been in Edmonton "in and out for close on five years."[4] Even in these cases, the pattern of movement initially from a rural area to the city remains intact. Mary K, for instance, moved to Saskatoon from Canora, Saskatchewan, and subsequently travelled through various towns and cities in Saskatchewan and Alberta before arriving in Edmonton.[5] The movement of these transient women can often be traced through the records of their convictions in other places. One woman's case file contains just such a "paper trail" detailing her previous encounters with law enforcement officials in Edmonton and Calgary. Millie C was convicted of keeping a bawdy house in Edmonton in 1915, then charged the next year with vagrancy in Calgary, followed by the charge of being an inmate of an Edmonton bawdy house in 1917, before being charged with vagrancy again, less than a month later, still in Edmonton. Millie was told by Calgary police to leave the city, indicating that there were instances when

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[4] PAA, 83.1/4088 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

[5] PAA, 83.1/9352 (Middle Series), procuring, 1935. The centres that Mary K names as her former places of residence include Calgary, Ponoka and Lloydminster.

prostitutes' movements between cities were not voluntary.[6]

When urban law officials became difficult, rural areas may have served as a hiatus. Like Mary K, many prostitutes moved not only from city to city but also to smaller towns from larger urban centres.[7] The stop in a smaller centre might also have been a stopover on the way from one city to another, where prostitutes, aware of a particular client pool, elected to secure some steady business. Because of the scarcity of scholarship on rural prostitution, it is difficult to comment with any certainty on its dynamics. Still, prostitution clearly existed in the hinterland; a local Methodist minister, for example, "claimed that Entwistle was a wide-open town where gross immorality was rampant."[8] Did rural prostitutes pursue their profession into Edmonton? The records examined are silent on this question. One woman's Edmonton case file indicated by way of a casual notation on the charge sheet that she had been previously convicted of keeping a bawdy house in Edson.[9] There is no indication, however, if Edson was her hometown, and the prostitutes' testimony sheds no light on her experiences there. Edson was home to many railway workers and

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[6] PAA, 83.1/5668 (Old Series), vagrancy, 1917.

[7] PAA, 83.1/9352 (Middle Series), procuring, 1935.

[8] S.W. Horrall, "The (Royal) North-West Mounted Police and Prostitution on the Canadian Prairies," Prairie Forum 10, 1 (1985): 119.

[9] PAA, 83.1/4077 (Old Series), keeping a bawdy house, 1914.

miners, though, suggesting that the prostitute might have been conscious of her potential client pool. Further research into prostitution in rural Alberta might turn up solid information regarding prostitution and the rural client base, or perhaps link the rural trade to prostitution in Edmonton. If nothing else, such research could provide a broader temporal and geographic context to the lives of individual prostitutes who originated from or ventured into those localities.

Almost all of the prostitutes in the sample confined their movements to western Canada, indicating that they had a regional orientation. The ease and frequency with which prostitutes moved around the West also reflects a well-developed sense of mobility, to a degree that is historically associated with frontier men. That sense of regional mobility is a quality that Edmonton's prostitute community shared with other urban prostitute populations in Canada. B. Jane Price's study of female criminals in Victorian Halifax, for instance, found that a majority of female offenders migrated to that city from rural areas or other smaller cities in the Maritimes.[10] Similarly, Lori Rotenburg shows how prostitution in turn-of-the-century Toronto was fed by migration from the

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[10] B. Jane Price, "'Raised in Rockhead. Died in the Poor House': Female Petty Criminals in Halifax, 1864-1890," in Essays in the History of Canadian Law, vol. 3 , ed. P. Girard and J. Phillips (Toronto 1989), 214-15.

city's hinterland, albeit to a significantly lesser degree.[11] Both works cite the appeal of an urban lifestyle as a major consideration for female migration to cities.[12] Because most of the women in the Edmonton sample were originally from the prairies, it seems likely that the image of Edmonton lurked at least on the fringes of their consciousness.

The movement of women from rural areas to urban centres, where they subsequently emerged as prostitutes, would seem to corroborate early twentieth-century reformers' fears about an increase in moral and social deviancy among women in the city.[13] Cities were also seen by anti-white-slave-trade activists as centres for the importation of immigrant women for the purposes of prostitution.[14] The mythology of white slavery that coalesced identified two sources for urban prostitution; first, native-born Canadian women were being procured by immigrant men, and second, foreign women were

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[11] Lori Rotenburg, "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century," in Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto 1974), 42.

[12] Judith Walkowitz also identifies patterns of migration among Victorian prostitutes in England, stating that "most prostitutes were either natives of the city or recent migrants from the local countryside." Judith Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State (Cambridge 1980), 16.

[13] Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto 1991), 133.

[14] John McLaren, Recalculating the Wages of Sin: The Social and Legal Construction of Prostitution in Canada, 1850-1920 (Winnipeg 1991), 22-39.

being brought into the country specifically to serve as prostitutes.[15] Some Canadian historians have begun to deconstruct the white slavery panic of the early twentieth century,[16] but the impression that immigrant women comprised a substantial proportion of urban prostitute communities remains. Crime historian D. Owen Carrington asserts that

> by the turn of the century more women of various colours and nationalities were gravitating westward to ply their trade...women of many races worked the streets, and brothels were run by black, Japanese, and white women.[17]

Edmonton's case files, however, do not bear testimony to such diversity. Non-Anglo ethnic and immigrant defendants account for fewer than thirty of nearly five hundred cases documented over four decades. Although Constance Backhouse warns that the absence of "minority women" in court records can be attributed to the disregard of those women by a "white supremacist, patriarchal regime," such polemic itself disregards the ethnic composition of many Canadian cities, including Edmonton.

Edmonton was, as previously discussed, a predominantly

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[15] Discussions of white slavery concerns are found in Valverde, Age of Light, Soap and Water, 77-103; Janice Newton, The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900-1918 (Montreal 1995), 118-22; and John McLaren, "Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada's Prostitution Laws, 1867-1917," Canadian Journal of Law and Society 1, 1 (1986): 125.

[16] See Valverde, Age of Light, Soap and Water, 89-103.

[17] D. Owen Carrington, Crime and Punishment in Canada: A History (Toronto 1991), 264. It should be cautioned that Carrington relies entirely on James Gray's work to substantiate his assertions on western Canadian prostitution.

Anglo community, and most of Edmonton's prostitutes in the sample were also of Anglo descent, usually born in Canada, often within the prairies. Edmonton's prostitute community thus reflected the ethnic characteristics of the city as a whole. An interesting contrast is presented by Calgary's prostitute population. Although Judy Bedford's study suggests that the number of "foreign" (that is, non-Anglo) prostitutes was also small in Calgary, the majority of women in the trade were "American immigrants, followed closely by women from central Canada, and a few from Britain."[18] Certainly in Edmonton the few immigrant women who do figure in the records tend to be American-born. Mamie S, having moved to Alberta from Texas with her husband to take a homestead, eventually left her spouse and came to Edmonton, where she subsequently became a prostitute.[19] The degree to which such American women felt "foreign" in Canada, or were considered alien by Canadians, is debatable. The aforementioned Mamie, for instance, was as mobile within western Canada as Canadian-born prostitutes, and her testimony does not indicate any

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[18] Judy Bedford, "Prostitution in Calgary, 1905-1914," Alberta History 29, 2 (1981): 8. Bedford's findings are not fully comparable to those of the present study of Edmonton, because of the narrower chronological parameters of her work. There is no comprehensive study of prostitution in Calgary between the advent of World War One and World War Two, a period which was crucial in the history of Edmonton's early prostitute community.

[19] PAA, 83.1/3073 (Old Series), living on avails, 1913.

particular sense of vulnerability or difference.[20] Prostitutes from the United States were then, in addition to being few in number, virtually indistinguishable from Canadian-born women in behaviour or attitude.

Although Ukrainian prostitutes in Edmonton, identified as "Galician" or "Ruthenian," formed an even smaller minority within the city's prostitute community than American women, they probably presented more of a concern to the city's social reformers. Only 1 per cent of all prostitution cases in the sample -- perhaps five or six out of 500 -- involved Ukrainian women,[21] but the number of services in the city directed towards immigrants from eastern and central Europe implies that these women were seen by social reformers as particularly vulnerable to becoming prostitutes. The limited testimony that Ukrainian women offer in the records does not indicate that they had any more propensity for entering prostitution than women from other backgrounds, and it is not clear how different their experiences in the city were from those of Canadian- and American-born prostitutes. The most revealing comment by a Ukrainian prostitute in Edmonton is made by Kate

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[20] PAA, 83.1/3073 (Old Series), living on avails, 1913.

[21] The existence of Ukrainian prostitutes in Edmonton is documented in sources other than court records, as well. Frances Swyripa, Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity 1891-1991 (Toronto 1993), 96, mentions a discussion in 1902 in the Ukrainian-language press of "older Ukrainian prostitutes in Edmonton...so lacking in national pride and self-respect that they competed for the favour of the city's metis."

S who stated that it was her husband -- also Ukrainian -- who forced her into prostitution.[22] Still, cases of Ukrainian prostitutes are so few in the records that it is virtually impossible to identify contiguities of experience among this subgroup of women, or indeed among immigrant prostitutes in general.

The rarity in the court records under examination of immigrant and non-white women within Edmonton's prostitute community does not eliminate the possibility that more ethnic and immigrant women were prostitutes in the city. The court documents, after all, are records only of women who were caught and charged with prostitution, or were asked to testify against their procurers. There is always the possibility that police resorted to different methods when dealing with immigrant or ethnic prostitutes. For example, a pamphlet produced by the WMS, which ran Edmonton's Ruthenian Girls' Home, reported on the case of a young girl "rescued" from a Chinese rooming house and delivered to the Home by police.[23] It is not clear if the girl was actually a prostitute, but the Ruthenian Girls' Home is hereby established as an avenue of recourse for the police. One of the earliest recorded cases of prostitution in Edmonton involved two Japanese women, identified only as "Hana" and "Sisi" by police. The North-West Mounted Police officer testifying at their trial claimed

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[22] PAA, 83.1/3879 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

[23] PAA, 75.387/421, UC 172/106, n.d.

that both women had been "up for prostitution twice before and were ordered to leave the place [the brothel]."[24] Police clearly exercised a degree of leniency in dealing with some prostitutes, offering a partial explanation for the near absence of immigrant women in the court records.

The ethnic homogeneity of Edmonton's early prostitute community indicated by the sample distinguishes it within other prostitute populations in major Canadian urban centres in the early twentieth century. Edmonton's general population was fairly homogeneous at that time, but this does not mean that sheer numbers of immigrant women were necessarily responsible for higher numbers of foreign-born prostitutes elsewhere. Lori Rotenburg suggests, for instance, that immigrant women were over-represented as prostitutes in turn-of-the-century Toronto -- that is, there was a higher percentage of immigrant women within the prostitute community than within the general female population -- primarily because of their "material and psychological vulnerability, in combination with their unfamiliarity with the city."[25] Did immigrant women in Edmonton find better support networks either within their ethnic communities or in society at large that prevented them from entering the profession in greater numbers? Or, as seems more likely, was the immigrant prostitution more insular and erratically regulated by law

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[24] PAA, 83.1/1067 (Old Series), living on avails, 1907.

[25] Rotenburg, "The Wayward Worker," 38.

enforcement officials?

Although social reformers, and subsequently historians, often characterized prostitutes by ethnicity -- and to a lesser degree, geographical origin -- to some extent these are external trappings of their identities. Marital status and family circumstances are overlooked and misunderstood as elements of prostitutes' backgrounds, yet they are crucial to understanding the factors which influenced prostitutes experiences as sex-trade workers and, at a more fundamental level, as women.

With respect to marital status, Edmonton's prostitute community displayed a staggering range of circumstances; in fact, the city's prostitutes included single, married, divorced, abandoned, and widowed women. A substantial number of prostitutes were married, however. One of the most interesting findings is that prostitutes were more likely, rather than less as one might suppose, to be married or involved in a common-law relationship. Sometimes marriage facilitated a woman's entry into prostitution. A moving case was presented by Eliza D, who testified through a Cree interpreter that her husband ordered her to "have relations" with other men. Her vulnerability was underscored when her husband, on trial for procuring, admonished her in Cree that she would "get him in trouble" if she told the court that he received money from men for her sexual services.[26] The theme

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[26] PAA, 83.1/1987 (Middle Series), procuring, 1921.

of coercion into prostitution by husbands is echoed by other women, as well.[27] An interesting twist is presented by Emma S, who revealed that her marriage was arranged by her procurers as a strategy to avoid detection by the police. If she was caught in a room with a client, she was to produce her authentic marriage certificate and claim the man was her husband.[28] Other prostitutes indicate that they, too, were asked by their procurers to identify themselves as married regardless of their actual marital status,[29] but Emma is the only woman in the sample to claim that her marriage was explicitly arranged as a cover for prostitution.

Many married prostitutes indicate that they ceased to have contact with their husbands altogether; most, in fact, had lost contact before becoming prostitutes in Edmonton. The case of Mary K is familiar: married at fourteen in a small Saskatchewan town, she was deserted by her husband after two years and eventually found her way to Edmonton in the company of another man.[30] It should be cautioned, however, that it is the element of estrangement that is typical. One assumption held about prostitutes by turn-of-the-century commentators was that widowhood or desertion by their husbands left women in

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[27] See PAA, 83.1/3879 (Old Series), procuring, 1914; and PAA, 83.1/4898 (Middle Series), procuring, 1926.

[28] PAA, 83.1/6001 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

[29] See PAA, 83.1/6052 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928.

[30] PAA, 83.1/9352 (Middle Series), procuring, 1935.

such destitute circumstances that they had no choice but to enter the profession.[31] By contrast, many Edmonton prostitutes indicate that they themselves had made the choice to live apart from their husbands, and that prostitution sometimes preceded separation. Others stated that their spouses were away, either looking for work elsewhere in western Canada or, during wartime, serving with the army in Europe.[32] It is not clear, however, how many of such husbands were aware that their wives worked as prostitutes or if prostitution was a factor in their estrangements. Lily M had a particularly unusual situation in that her own husband informed police of her illegal activities when she left him and her three children in order to be free to socialize with the soldiers she met at local railway stations.[33] Lily's case is also different because she had children; only a few women in the sample indicated that they did.[34]

Almost all prostitutes in the sample did have some kind of emotional relationship in their lives. Most, in fact, had

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[31] Gray, Red Lights, 35.

[32] PAA, 83.1/4218 (Old Series),procuring, 1915; PAA, 83.1/4863 (Old Series), procuring, 1916; PAA, 83.1/5727 (Old Series), procuring, 1917; and PAA, 83.1/3538 (Middle Series), procuring, 1923.

[33] PAA, 83.1/5670 (Old Series), prostitution, 1917.

[34] Prostitutes with children include PAA, 83.1/5852 (Old Series), procuring, 1917; PAA, 83.1/7701 (Old Series), inmate of a bawdy house and also endangering a minor (83.1/7700), 1919; and PAA, 83.1/4898 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1926.

personal relationships with their pimps, usually through common-law arrangements. Harriet P, who also used her procurer's last name at times, revealed that she lived with him "as his wife" not only while prostituting in Edmonton but also while working in Calgary, where they were both charged under various morality laws.[35] Other prostitutes indicated that they accompanied their pimps into Edmonton. An interesting case is presented by Mamie S, who, after leaving her husband on a homestead, came to the city with her husband's foster father.[36] The nature of prostitutes' professional associations with their pimps influenced the degree of their emotional involvement. Germaine C, for example, was clearly terrified of her pimp, who raped her in a British Columbia mining camp and forced her to accompany him to Edmonton as a prostitute.[37] By contrast, Maggie T declared her allegiance to "her man" quite proudly, boasting that he wanted to marry her but she had refused.[38] Germaine and Maggie likely illustrate two extremes of the personal power prostitutes felt in the complex relationships they had with their pimps and partners.

Prostitutes' family backgrounds provide a further glimpse

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[35] PAA, 83.1/3503 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

[36] PAA, 83.1/3073 (Old Series), living on avails, 1913.

[37] PAA, 83.1/3269 (Old Series), procuring, 1913.

[38] PAA, 83.1/1157 (Middle Series), keeping a bawdy house, 1920.

into their inner worlds. A popular early twentieth-century police theory held that "many girls drifted into prostitution from a sub-marginal home environment."[39] Lori Rotenburg points out that the annual conferences of the National Council of Women of Canada in 1912 and 1913 discussed how poor relations between girls and their parents forced the former to leave their homes at a young and vulnerable age.[40] Undeniably, prostitutes' family circumstances informed their actions to some extent. Prostitutes in the Edmonton sample, for example, tended to be young -- sixteen to twenty-four years old -- and many had just left their parents' homes before becoming prostitutes in the city. Most prostitutes over the age of twenty, however, do not mention their parental families at all, indicating that parental figures had receded from their consciousness. These women are also most likely to have garnered substantial experience as prostitutes before appearing in Edmonton, evidence that separation from the family, migration to the city, and introduction to prostitution all happened at a young age.

Some prostitutes certainly had particularly difficult home lives. Sixteen-year-old Emma S, for instance, lived with her brother in Grande Prairie, but left after he became verbally abusive. A man she met on the train out of Grande Prairie invited her to Edmonton, only to abandon her after

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[39] Gray, Red Lights, 35.

[40] Rotenburg, "The Wayward Worker," 45.

introducing her to prostitution.[41] Neglect, however, was far more common than abuse. In one case, a probation officer for the provincial government testified that a girl charged with vagrancy had been a ward of the Neglected Children's Department for five years prior to her arrest.[42] In another case, a prostitute admitted that she had been an inmate of the Alberta Home for Girls.[43] Desertion by a parent was another frequent assertion. Several prostitutes came from broken homes, claiming that they did not know the whereabouts of one of their parents.[44] Lillian L, who knew perfectly well who her father was, insisted "I have no father."[45]

It is by no means clear, however, that most prostitutes came from abusive or neglectful family situations. They might, of course, have elected not to reveal such details about their backgrounds in their testimony, and indeed often were not asked direct questions about their families in court. But it is apparent that some prostitutes also came from homes that reformers and the police alike would have considered stable and respectable. For example, Stella B's background is revealed in correspondence between her father, the chief of police in Mellville, Saskatchewan, and Emily Murphy. After

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[41] PAA, 83.1/5844 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

[42] PAA, 83.1/6831 (Old Series), vagrancy, 1918.

[43] PAA, 83.1/950 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1920.

[44] PAA, 83.1/7220 (Old Series), vagrancy, 1919.

[45] PAA, 83.1/6340 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928.

Stella appeared before her on vagrancy charges, Magistrate Murphy wrote to Stella's father because she felt that he, as a member of the police force, could "take the necessary steps to prevent [Stella] continuing the life she has been thoughtlessly and innocently drawn into."[46] Later letters indicate that neither of Stella's parents could exercise any moral sway over their daughter and convince her to come home. One suspects that the young woman found her home life too restrictive and city life, whatever its drawbacks, more compelling. Nonetheless, police would hardly have described her home family environment -- led as it was by a police chief -- as "sub-marginal."

In light of the fact that rural-to-urban migration was a huge source of prostitution in Edmonton, it is safe to suggest that most of the women came from farming families. The fatherless Lillian L also let it be known, for instance, that she was the youngest of thirteen siblings who farmed with their mother and worked in sawmills around Junkins, Alberta.[47] Many prostitutes discussed leaving their parents on homesteads and farms around the prairies, but they tend not to indicate if any kind of family discord or economic crisis

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[46] CEA, M62, F2, letter dated 21 May 1917 from Emily Murphy.

[47] PAA, 83.1/6340 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928.

was responsible for their desire to leave.[48] Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain what kind of parental home life most Edmonton prostitutes experienced, and there is no scholarly examination of everyday social and familial relations in rural western Canada to shed light on the experiences of young women in those areas. However, a study of migration from rural Nova Scotia in the late nineteenth century found that poverty and overcrowding in households were major factors in the decisions of many young women to migrate to urban areas,[49] and B. Jane Price has shown how a high proportion of such women ended up as prostitutes in Halifax.[50] American and British studies, too, corroborate the notion that prostitutes tended to come from rural families that had experienced disruptions in their financial or social circumstances.[51] Rebecca Priegert Coulter has argued that because young rural women were expected to earn money to help support the family, the movement of daughters to the city was part of a family's survival

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[48] PAA, 83.1/3045 (Old Series), procuring, 1913; PAA, 83.1/3978 (Middle Series), procuring, 1924; and PAA, 83.1/6052 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928.

[49] Alan A. Brookes, "Family, Youth, and Leaving Home in Late Nineteenth-Century Rural Nova Scotia: Canning and the Exodus, 1868-1893," in Childhood and Family in Canadian History, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto 1982), 104.

[50] Price, "'Raised in Rockhead. Died in the Poor House'," 215.

[51] See, for instance, Ruth Rosen, The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918 (Baltimore 1982), 138-39; and Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, 16-17.

strategy.[52] Rather than fleeing their homes, prostitutes may have originally left with parental approval and sanction.

Prostitutes have been called the "unskilled daughters of the unskilled classes."[53] The lack of marketable skills that would earn them decent wages undoubtedly lay behind the choice of most Edmonton prostitutes to enter the trade. Significantly, Edmonton's prostitute community consisted of a group of women who, in addition to their criminal activities, engaged in what would have been considered "legitimate" work as well. The major pattern that emerges is one of the hotel chambermaid, domestic servant, or restaurant waitress turning to prostitution either to replace or to supplement her employment.[54] Although the Criminal Statistics sheets for prostitutes usually listed the women as having a specific trade such as "waitress" or "housekeeper,"[55] there is evidence that women moved freely among occupations. Josephine V, for instance, stated that she had worked in rooming houses,

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[52] Rebecca Priegert Coulter, "Between School and Marriage: A Case Study Approach to Young Women's Work in Early Twentieth-Century Canada," History of Education Review 18, 2 (1989): 22. Frances Swyripa, Wedded to the Cause, 91, has shown that this practice was common among Ukrainian immigrants, as well.

[53] Abraham Flexner, Prostitution in Europe (New York 1914), 6.

[54] PAA, 83.1/4066 (Old Series); keeping a bawdy house, 1915; PAA, 83.1/6340 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928; and PAA, 83.1/8781 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1933.

[55] Criminal Statistics sheets are found in PAA, 83.1/ 5668 (Old Series), vagrancy, 1917; and PAA, 83.1/6035 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

hotels and private houses in a variety of capacities including maid, domestic servant, and "kitchen girl."[56] Nor did such women necessarily give up their other jobs when engaged in prostitution. Josephine was still employed by an Edmonton fruit store when she was asked to testify against her procurer. A number of prostitutes also found work in Edmonton's many cabarets. Edna C, for instance, worked at the International Hotel, where she received 2 per cent of the profits on drinks she sold.[57] In another case, Minnie L revealed that her two professions collided in the cabaret where she worked. As a singer in the St. Petersburg bar, she received a percentage of drink profits, but supplemented that income with the money she earned prostituting with men she met in the cabaret.[58]

Some prostitutes reported owning their own rooming houses, or businesses such as soft drink stands or manicuring parlours, but certainly such businesses were not lucrative.[59] Bessie B, for instance, admitted that she "did not make enough to keep herself" on the earnings of her Edmonton massaging and manicuring parlour. She was typical of many prostitutes who were reluctant to relinquish their places in the "respectable"

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[56] PAA, 83.1/5852 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

[57] PAA, 83.1/420 (Middle series), vagrancy, 1920.

[58] PAA, 83.1/7308 (Old Series), living on avails, 1919.

[59] PAA, 83.1/1157 (Middle Series), keeping a bawdy house, 1920; PAA, 83.1/6035 (Old Series), procuring, 1917; and PAA, 83.1/3997 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

labour market for working-class women. Despite being charged with prostitution, Bessie still considered her trade to be "massage and manicuring and such as that."[60] Prostitutes continued to be employed or to seek employment in typical working-class women's jobs, ones in which other women who were not prostitutes also engaged: factory workers, waitresses, maids, domestic servants.

This profile of Edmonton's prostitute community is only the initial sketch of the historical architect attempting to reconstruct the complexity of a particular human community. Yet it serves two important purposes. First, it deconstructs the image of the prostitute created by contemporary social reformers who were the most prolific commentators on prostitution. Edmonton's prostitutes were not generally immigrant or ethnic, or single women. Rather, they tended to be Anglo migrants from rural areas around western Canada who participated in some sort of marriage relationship, be it traditional or common-law. Second, prostitutes' participation in other working-class occupations that the profile reveals offers a broader social context within which to situate their lives.

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[60] PAA, 83.1/3997 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

Chapter 4

LIFESTYLE AND COMMUNITY: PROSTITUTION'S PHYSICAL AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS IN EDMONTON

On the night of 3 February 1917, Annie Z went to the Venice Cafe on First Street with her friends Maggie T and Annie T, accompanied by a few men they had met at the Lyric Dance Hall earlier that evening. After supper Annie Z went back to her room at the Castle Hotel with one of the men. As a result of her evening's activities, two days later she was called before Magistrate Emily Murphy on a charge of vagrancy. After Constable Petheram testified that Annie was a "well-known nightwalker and prostitute," she was found guilty and sentenced to a month in jail. Murphy had indicated that she wanted to ask the woman a few questions before passing sentence, but the defence lawyer protested and Annie was not able to speak on her own behalf.[1] Nevertheless, the account of Annie's transgression paints a vivid picture of the way prostitution was conducted in Edmonton. The dance hall and rooming house, female friends and their male companions -- all were basic elements of a prostitute's physical and human environment in the city. Prostitution in Edmonton, conducted within the residential and recreational infrastructure of the city's working-class community, was also woven into its social fabric.

In most western Canadian urban centres, prostitution is

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[1] PAA, 83.1/5621 (Old Series), vagrancy, 1917.

associated with the existence of either officially or tacitly sanctioned "vice districts" which were usually segregated from the mainstream community: for example, Winnipeg's McFarlane and Rachel streets[2] or Calgary's Nose Creek.[3] In early twentieth-century Edmonton, however, though visibly concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, prostitution was never quite so isolated. Court records show that prostitute activity flourished mainly in a cluster of streets on the north side of Jasper Avenue (101 Avenue) from 93 to 101 streets. First Street (101 Street), Namayo Avenue (97 Street), Wilson Street (110 Avenue), Jasper Avenue (101 Avenue), Sinclair Street (95A Street) are the names that appear repeatedly in the files.[4] The adjacent north Edmonton neighbourhoods of Calder and Norwood claimed a more limited share of the sex trade; Norwood residents, concerned about local disturbances, even circulated a petition in 1907 demanding that police close down the "houses of ill-fame"

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[2] Segregated vice in Winnipeg is discussed in Alan F.J. Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914 (Montreal 1975), ch. 14: "Red Lights in Winnipeg: Segregated Vice, Moral Reformers, and Civic Politics," 246-66.

[3] Judy Bedford, "Prostitution in Calgary, 1905-1914," Alberta History 29, 2 (1981): 4-7, outlines some of the controversies about Nose Creek in that city's history, including the eventual movement of the vice district to an area known as "South Coulee."

[4] In 1914, all Edmonton street names were officially renumbered, but many names were retained in informal use. Jasper Avenue, for instance, became 101 Avenue, but the old name endured. To prevent confusion here and to help draw a clear picture of the city centre's layout, street names will be accompanied by their numerical counterparts in parentheses.

situated in their area.[5] Curiously, the records are virtually devoid of any mention of South Edmonton, suggesting that policing patterns were different south of the river (or less likely, that prostitution was not conducted in this part of the city at all). Looking more closely at the area where the trade was most visible -- the city centre -- it becomes clear that prostitute activity gravitated to working-class centres characterized by the presence of a diverse economic and social life.

The city centre was the heart of Edmonton's commercial and industrial zone, and prostitution was but one of many commercial enterprises attracted to this area. Along the railway lines that extended into its heart, a range of industry surfaced: bakeries, sheet metal shops, printing shops, garment factories, lumber yards, tanneries, wood yards and liveries, to name a few.[6] Commercial activity made the downtown core a major thoroughfare of human traffic, as industry drew labourers and the railway station deposited new arrivals with regularity. Years later, one city resident recalled that Edmonton was initially ill-prepared to receive these newcomers: "The city was buzzing no matter where you went. Hotels, rooming houses and boarding houses were filled to overflowing. Because of the lack of accommodation in the

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[5] Edmonton Journal, 20 and 25 March 1908.

[6] Owen D. Jones, "The Historical Geography of Edmonton" (M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1962), 34.

city, people were forced to live in tents."[7] It was during these early years that the city centre became established as an area of cheap housing, as a variety of working-class tenements were hastily constructed to accommodate the tide of human migration to the city. The residential landscape was dominated by two-storey "narrow, poorly designed houses" flanked by tiny bungalows,[8] creating an atmosphere of geographic intimacy that endured into the 1930s, despite an abatement of the city's initial housing crisis. Norwood and Calder, residential areas serving stockyards and railyards in north Edmonton, in time developed better quality housing, and it was not uncommon for people looking at long-term residence in Edmonton to move into these districts.[9]

While Edmonton's central core remained more of an indigent residential neighbourhood throughout the first half of the twentieth century, it also constituted a bona fide community from the beginning, with a number of centres for social interaction. James Gray, labelling this section of the city the "Old Town," lists its institutions: "rooming houses, cheap hotels, poolrooms, Chinese laundries, bars, odiferous restaurants, and small stores."[10] The social dimension of

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[7] A.F. Dreger, A Most Diversified Character (Edmonton 1971), 66.

[8] Jones, "Historical Geography of Edmonton," 58.

[9] Ibid., 80.

[10] James Gray, Red Lights on the Prairies (Toronto 1971), 126.

this working-class neighbourhood facilitated the conduct of prostitution by giving prostitutes a readily available and easily accessible client pool. South Edmonton, despite hosting its own railway station and a fair share of commercial enterprise, did not develop a comparable working-class core, which may explain why prostitution was less visible on that side of the river. Prostitutes tended to attach themselves to the drinking and lodging establishments of downtown Edmonton, conscious of where to find their clientele.

At the same time, prostitutes did not locate in central Edmonton only to participate in the sex trade. As with the broader working-class community, the city centre was simultaneously a living, working, and recreational zone for these women. The specific case of the "brothel" is illustrative of this multiplicity. "Brothels" are identified by James Gray as a major locus for the conduct of the sex trade in early twentieth-century Edmonton,[11] and Mariana Valverde has relied on Gray's statement to declare that such buildings were a "fact" in the city.[12] There would seem to be ample evidence to support this claim; after all, in 1914, Judge Scott, appointed to head an official inquiry into vice in Edmonton, was astonished to receive a list of one hundred

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[11] Ibid., 26.

[12] Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto 1991), 85.

existing houses of prostitution.[13] But a closer examination of the "brothel" reveals that such houses were both informal and ambiguous in function, existing as much, if not more, for legitimate purposes as for the conduct of prostitution.

Laws concerning houses of prostitution defined them liberally; by law, any place where prostitution occurred could be considered a "house of ill-fame."[14] Most of the houses identified in the court records under examination as brothels were actually rooming houses and hotels. Some of these establishments clearly existed primarily for the purposes of prostitution. The Acme Rooms, for instance, appears several times in court records as a place where prostitution occurred,[15] and prostitutes identified its premises as a specific place of assignation. Harriet S stated that she would sometimes take her clients to the Acme Rooms, where they registered as husband and wife. That the place served only this professional function for her is made clear by her additional statement that she did not live there and that the owner had no control over her dealings.[16] Beatrice B, however, did live at the Acme Rooms and revealed that the proprietor could act as a pimp. In Beatrice's case, the owner

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[13] Ibid., 38.

[14] Criminal Code of Canada S.C., 1892, c. 29, s.225.

[15] PAA, 83.1/3503 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914; and PAA, 83.1/4718 (Old Series), keeping a bawdy house, 1915.

[16] PAA, 83.1/3503 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

of the rooming house sent clients up to her room and charged the men six dollars -- one dollar for the room and five for the woman's sexual services.[17] Even though places like the Acme Rooms[18] appear frequently enough in the records that they can be assumed to have operated primarily as venues for commercial sexual transactions -- or simply put, as "brothels" -- they inevitably show that prostitution was often also an informal business in Edmonton.

The "brothel" concept in Edmonton is ambiguous. Operations like the Acme Rooms were not the formal brothels of early twentieth-century Montreal, the only Canadian city for which a historical study of the structure of houses of prostitution is available.[19] Montreal's brothels had internal hierarchies delineating the relationships of all people associated with them. The building would be owned by a man or woman who lived in another area of the city and basically just received the profits, while a madam, who also lived elsewhere, would assume control over the daily operations, sometimes

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[17] PAA, 83.1/4718 (Old Series), keeping a bawdy house, 1915.

[18] Another example is the London Rooms which appears in PAA, 83.1/7211 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1930, and again in 83.1/277 (New Series), keeping a disorderly house, 1937. Earlier, the same building was identified only by its street address of 10308 96 Street in PAA, 83.1/7663 (Old Series), keeping a disorderly house, 1919.

[19] Andrée Lévesque, "Le Bordel: Milieu de travail controlé," Labour 20 (1987): 13-32. The findings of this article are also distilled into two pages in her Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939 (Montreal 1994), 121-22.

assisted by a live-in housekeeper. Prostitutes occupied the lowest rung of this hierarchy, their lives regulated by the house manager who controlled everything from mealtimes to clothing to punishments. These were specialized centres of commercial sexual activity, where women lived as prostitutes and men visited as clients. Andrée Lévesque makes the point that prostitution in Montreal was legalized, as opposed to clandestine, and the brothel, serving as a method of public control, had a clear function.[20]

Edmonton's "brothels," in contrast, had no set form at all. As was seen in the case of the Acme Rooms, one "brothel" could function differently for different prostitutes and the degree of control these women exercised varied. Harriet S had no official connection to the Acme Rooms; she simply chose to entertain her clients there sometimes. Most importantly, beyond receiving the rent for the room, Margaret S, the owner of the rooming house, had no dealings with her.[21] She was, on the other hand, a pimp to Beatrice B and controlled her activities in the house, though Beatrice relinquished control voluntarily by moving to the Acme Rooms after two years of living in other houses in Edmonton. According to her file, Margaret also had a previous charge sheet of keeping a bawdy

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[20] Lévesque, Making and Breaking the Rules, 121-22.

[21] PAA, 83.1/3503 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

house,[22] but it is not clear if the circumstances resembled Beatrice's or Harriet's. Nevertheless, this "brothel" was a far cry from Montreal's regimented operations.

An equally important point is that not all rooming houses functioned primarily as brothels, nor did all prostitutes go to them only to conduct their trade. Rooming houses were also important as residential facilities for Edmonton's working class, and, to working women, as places of employment. As the first stop for many newcomers to Edmonton -- and especially considering the lack of "clean bright rooms" in "safe institutions" identified by the Local Council of Women as late as 1929[23] -- rooming houses tended to serve as semi-permanent homes to men and women alike. Although a number of charitable organizations established residences for women in central Edmonton -- like the Ruthenian Girls' Home, the YWCA, and the Home of the Good Shepherd -- few prostitutes in the sample indicate any awareness of their existence.[24] Most of these women lived in rooming houses. When Martha N appeared in court to testify against her procurer, she was living at the Ruthenian Girls' Home, but previous to that spent the

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[22] PAA, 83.1/4718 (Old Series), keeping a bawdy house, 1915.

[23] Edmonton Journal, 25 May 1929.

[24] Diana Pederson, "'Building Today for the Womanhood of Tomorrow': Businessmen, Boosters, and the YWCA, 1890-1930," Urban History Review 15, 3 (1987): 229-30, explains that the establishment of safe and morally regulated residences for women was one of the highest priorities of the YWCA and other urban women's organizations in Canada.

first six weeks after arriving from Chauvin in downtown rooming houses and hotels, where she met her procurer.[25] Martha offered no indication of how she wound up at the Ruthenian Girls' Home, but it seems likely that she was referred there after being taken into custody. An undated pamphlet produced by the Woman's Missionary Society in charge the Home noted that the police had, in the past, "rescued" girls from suspicious homes and delivered them to the society's care.[26] But if newly arrived rural women did not head straight for the safe shelter of Edmonton's social service homes, that does not mean that they deliberately sought out houses where they could engage in prostitution, either.

Some women were taken to specific houses and hotels and set up as prostitutes in their rooms by male companions or acquaintances. Emma S's story was fairly common. While fleeing her unhappy Grande Prairie home, she met a man on the train who persuaded her to come to Edmonton with him. Even though Emma had only meant to go as far as Grouard, when the man paid her way to the city, she agreed to accompany him. Once in Edmonton, the man took her to the Northern Hotel where they registered as "man and wife," and he eventually started

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[25] PAA, 83.1/3389 (Old Series), procuring, 1913.

[26] PAA, 75.837/421, Records of the United Church of Canada, UC 172/106, n.d.

bringing clients to their room.[27] There is no indication in Emma's testimony that she went to that rooming house assuming it was a brothel or intending to become a prostitute. In fact, she even laid charges against her procurer, because he had promised to get her a legitimate job if she came to Edmonton and had abandoned her to prostitution instead.[28] Emma, like many prostitutes in the records, entered the profession somewhat blindly. There is evidence that some men rode the trains preying on naive country girls like Emma, who were either looking for an escape from their rural homes or for opportunities in the city. In a letter to her family in Britain, a female traveller on the prairies claimed to have witnessed "white slave traffickers who conduct infamous trade openly on the trains and in the stations."[29] How prevalent these "white slavers" were is unclear. Most prostitutes in the sample who lived with men in Edmonton had not met them en route to the city. Rather, the women had either lived with and worked for the men in other cities or met them after settling in Edmonton.[30]

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[27] PAA, 83.1/5844 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

[28] PAA, 83.1/6001 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

[29] David C. Jones, "It's All Lies They Tell You: Immigrants, Hosts and the CPR," in The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Toronto 1984), 110.

[30] See, for instance, PAA, 83.1/6838 (Old Series), living on avails, 1918; and PAA, 83.1/6543 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1929.

Prostitutes also worked legitimately as maids in rooming houses and hotels, and often claimed to have had no intention of joining the profession when they first took up their positions. It was not uncommon for rooming-house owners to recruit for prostitutes under the pretence of hiring maids. Mary A and Jessie Y, witnesses in a procuring trial, told police that when they responded to an Edmonton Journal advertisement for a chambermaid at the Stevens Rooms, they were told by the proprietor that she "wanted a fast girl" and that "when we have a girl working here we like her to make money." Both women insisted that they had refused the offer.[31] Anna B, not having been told outright what the full extent of her duties could be, was not given the same opportunity to decide with open eyes. Hired as a chambermaid at a local hotel, she testified that a man came to her room, claiming that her boss had sent him to her. After handing her three dollars, he forced her to have sexual relations with him. The boss later came to collect his commission, and continued to send men to her.[32] What is significant about these two stories is that the women did not try to enter the rooming houses as prostitutes, but as legitimate workers. Anna B continued to work as a maid while she prostituted, indicating that more than one type of service was required

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[31] CEA, R.G.11, C17, F48, City Commissioner's Papers, Police Department Special Report on rooming house license revokings because of convictions on bawdy house charges.

[32] PAA, 83.1/205A (Middle Series), living on avails, 1920.

from her by the rooming house owner.[33] It apparently was a real rooming house, serving bona fide tenants, as well.

Prostitutes also convey the impression that they took their legitimate work seriously. Strikingly, most prostitutes who worked in rooming houses did not have encounters with their clients in those buildings, and usually lived themselves in a different rooming house altogether. Anna B is obviously an exception to this pattern. Annie N's case was more typical: working at the Northern Rooming House, she lived at the Waverly House and accompanied the clients whom she would meet in dance halls and cabarets to their rooms, most of which were in different buildings.[34] Annie's story also suggests that prostitutes tried to separate their personal and professional lives to some degree, although this process was naturally complicated by the fact that they tended to lead dual professional lives, as legitimate and as sex trade workers.

Prostitutes who worked as waitresses in cabarets and cafes were more likely to solicit clients on the job. Magistrate Emily Murphy, in fact, warned the deputy-attorney general in 1917 that prostitution was beginning to occur "under the cover of amusements which in themselves are

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[33] Ibid.

[34] PAA, 83.1/6228 (Old Series), living on avails, 1917.

legitimate."[35] Murphy was specifically suggesting that the cabarets which had recently been introduced to Edmonton were being used to cloak prostitution. Court records indicate that the cloaking practice had started earlier with cafes. Marie M, for instance, did what she considered to be standard procedure. On getting a job as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant, she asked her employer if she could use a room upstairs in the building for prostitution. In court, Marie claimed to have been a "bench hooker" for five years, working in restaurants and making dates with the customers herself without the intervention of a pimp.[36] Edmontonians later pointed to bath houses, dance halls and taxi companies as illicit conduits for the trade. In 1929, for instance, police were pressured to investigate license applicants for all three endeavours.[37] Lillian L confirmed that drivers from a particular taxi company would inform their customers about her services. Nevertheless, Lillian also demonstrated the duality of prostitutes' lives: she continued to work as a domestic servant even during her tenure as a prostitute.[38] Like many women in the sample, she seemed reluctant to relinquish all

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[35] CEA, M62, F21, Emily Murphy Magisterial Papers, letter from Murphy to Deputy-Attorney General A.G. Browning re: Canadian Criminal Code, dated 16 April 1917.

[36] PAA, 83.1/4088 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

[37] CEA, RG11 C67 F7 (bath houses), RG11 C66 F39 (dance halls), and RG11 C17 F3 (taxi companies), City Commissioner's Papers.

[38] PAA, 83.1/6340 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928.

connection with legitimate work. But if prostitutes like Marie M considered their jobs in restaurants and cafes as opportunities to solicit clients, prostitutes with legitimate jobs in rooming houses did not seem to press their advantage. Yet neither group was engaged in prostitution all the time. Simply put, these women were full-time workers, but that work was not always prostitution.

The rooming houses, cafes, cabarets, bath houses, dance halls and other businesses that are represented in the criminal case files as venues for prostitution were actually part of a broader social network for Edmonton's working class. As businesses, few of them existed solely or even primarily for the conduct of prostitution. They were what social reformer J.S. Woodsworth, no proponent of the urban lifestyle, labelled derisively in 1911 a city's "centres of social life."[39] Although he dismissed such venues as "abnormal and demoralizing," they were essential to the working class as places of social (and, it seems, sexual) intercourse. In them, prostitution became an extension of working-class activity, giving prostitutes a place in their community. Prostitutes initially secured that place anyway simply by virtue of being working-class women themselves, living and working at legitimate jobs in central Edmonton.

The recognition that prostitutes were part of a larger working-class community begs the question of what

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[39] J.S. Woodsworth, My Neighbour (Toronto 1972), 91.

distinguished the prostitute's experience from that of other working-class women in Edmonton. Certainly, their antecedents were similar. The general profile of the working-class woman showed her to be Anglo and rural western Canadian in origin.[40] The profile of Edmonton's prostitute community demonstrated, conversely, that most prostitutes had worked or continued to work in lawful professions: indeed, most considered themselves "working girls." Emma E stated that she had worked for almost a year at a housekeeping job in Edmonton that paid her fifteen dollars per month plus board. When she lost her job, a male acquaintance suggested that she prostitute herself with the clients he solicited on her behalf. Although Emma was able to make more money as a prostitute, charging each client two to four dollars, she saw prostitution as a temporary measure. At the trial, Emma claimed that she had told her procurer "not to bother [soliciting clients] because I might find some work pretty soon." [41] Again, it would seem that prostitutes tended not to relinquish completely their status as non-criminal working women.

Police and the general public had their own ways of distinguishing prostitutes from other working-class women. Police often identified prostitutes as women "with no visible

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[40] Rebecca Coulter, "The Working Young of Edmonton, 1921-1931," in Childhood and Family in Canadian History, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto 1982), 144.

[41] PAA, 83.1/6052 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928.

means of support."[42] Another major criterion used to discern immoral (hence, criminal) conduct was appearance. Hana and Sisi, for example, were described by police as being "dressed like prostitutes."[43] Mariana Valverde has discussed the belief of Victorian-era middle-class moralists that "women's sartorial vanity caused moral and financial decline" and that "different types of finery played an important role in differentiating the already fallen."[44] A similar philosophy seems to have been implicitly at work in early twentieth-century Edmonton. One witness in the trial of a man charged with living on the avails of prostitution was demonstrably preoccupied with the dress of the prostitute in question; she referred to the alleged prostitute only as "the woman with the red plume," though she knew the woman's name was Marie.[45] In another case, Mary B reported that she was offered the "silk dresses and waists that belonged to a girl now in jail" by a man attempting to procure her[46]; Mary claimed that she declined the offer, perhaps having internalized the negative

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[42] PAA, 83.1/1067 (Old Series), living on avails, 1907. Indeed, the formal charge read "having no peacable calling to maintain themselves by, for the most part support themselves by the avails of prostitution."

[43] Ibid.

[44] Mariana Valverde, "The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth Century Social Discourse," Victorian Studies 33, 4 (1989): 170, 175-76.

[45] PAA, 83.1/3517 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

[46] PAA, 83.1/5727 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

connotations of supposedly extravagant dress. Middle-class reformers had already begun to preach actively against the wearing of fancy clothes by women. Nellie McClung, for instance, warned that such women invited trouble: "If women could be made to think, they would not wear immodest clothes, which suggest evil thoughts and awaken unlawful desires."[47] Without in-depth examination of the associations that elaborate dress had in western Canadian popular culture, it is still clear that prostitution evoked a specific visual image in the public consciousness -- one in which extravagance in dress merged with moral laxity.

There are more concrete distinctions between prostitutes and other working-class women that can be made, but how much these differences affected the consciousness of prostitutes is uncertain. Lori Rotenburg's study of prostitution in turn-of-the-century Toronto found, for instance, that even though prostitutes laboured under working conditions as harsh as those experienced by other working women, prostitution itself entailed different occupational hazards.[48] In the Edmonton case, similar dangers can be identified even though they should by no means be extrapolated as universal conditions of prostitution in the city. The court records, for instance,

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[47] Nellie McClung, In Times Like These (Toronto 1915), 34.

[48] Lori Rotenburg, "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century," in Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto 1974), 50.

contain a number of graphic stories of abuse by pimps. One police officer witnessed a particularly brutal incident:

> This man slapped her in the face and said "You are a crazy bitch. I am peddling boose [sic] here and not getting a goddamned cent out of it. I will let you go to hell and get another woman. Every time I bring a bottle of boose up here you drink it all up and get drunk, you are not bringing enough dough for me. You don't even meet me half way..." Lottie called [him] a goddamned pimp and he slapped her in the eye and he said "Shut up or I will give you another black eye." Lottie said something to him and he said, "I will hit you right under your goddamned chin." and she said "Do it." and he hit her. He picked her up from the floor and put her on the bed and knocked her head against the wall.[49]

Significantly, even though Lottie's situation was typical of many prostitutes who worked under pimps, this type of abuse distinguished these women's experiences from those of prostitutes who worked independently and did not have to deal with the same degree of verbal or physical intimidation. Degrees of intimidation could vary even among prostitutes who worked with pimps. Prostitutes had a variety of emotional and marital attachments to their pimps, but even such intimate personal relationships did not guarantee gentle treatment. Several prostitutes reported being forced into prostitution by their husbands; one woman became a prostitute despite having told her husband that she "would rather die than do that."[50]

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[49] PAA, 83.1/5766 (Old Series), living on the avails, 1917.

[50] PAA, 83.1/7308 (Old Series), living on avails, 1919. Other cases of women being forced to prostitute by their husbands include PAA, 83.1/3879 (Old Series), procuring, 1914; and 83.1/1987 (Middle Series), procuring, 1921.

At the same time, some prostitutes got along very well with their pimps and considered their relationships with the men to be partnerships. Frances F, for instance, handled all of the money, while her pimp George J solicited the clients on her behalf. In her case, no particular intimidation seemed to be involved, since she indicated that she would make her living as a "vag" (a prostitute) even if she separated from her pimp.[51]

Not all prostitutes who worked with pimps had the same degree of control over money and clientele as Frances F. Minnie L admitted that her procurer beat her for not bringing back enough money.[52] In fact, the woman's friend testified that in addition to being terrified of her current pimp, Minnie was also scared to move back to Calgary where it seemed she had left another abusive procurer. Few pimps actually took all of the money that their prostitutes made. One exception was Kate S, whose husband-pimp likely considered himself to be exercising his spousal rights.[53] More common was Bessie B's situation where her procurer demanded half of her earnings. Bessie's situation was also typical of prostitutes living with their pimps in that she paid all of the couple's expenses out of her share of the money. When Bessie tried to withhold some of the earnings to pay their

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[51] PAA, 83.1/9014 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1934.

[52] PAA, 83.1/7308 (Old Series), living on avails, 1919.

[53] PAA, 83.1/3879 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

rent, she said, "he was going to pick my blood for the money he claimed I owed him."[54] A less common complaint voiced by prostitutes was their lack of control over clientele. Though most women testified that their pimps were in charge of either sending or bringing men to their rooms, only a few women -- like Anna B, who was forced into sexual relations with her first client -- were obviously upset by a sense of powerlessness.[55]

Perhaps the most universal hazard that Edmonton prostitutes faced was the threat of venereal disease, a risk to which they were repeatedly exposed by the nature of their activities. Jay Cassel has demonstrated that prostitutes became the major targets of a nation-wide campaign against the spread of venereal diseases after infected soldiers began to return from the First World War.[56] In Edmonton, however, panic about sexually-transmitted infections emerged as early as 1907, when a city alderman insisted that all prostitutes working in Norwood brothels undergo medical examination.[57] Because health problems in early twentieth-century Edmonton are generally poorly documented, it is impossible to measure the extent to which prostitutes were infected by various

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[54] PAA, 83.1/3997 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

[55] PAA, 83.1/205A (Middle Series), living on avails, 1920.

[56] Jay Cassel, The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada, 1838-1939 (Toronto 1987), 126-27.

[57] Day, "May Buchanan's Disorderly House," 11-12.

sexually-transmitted diseases. What is clear is that the Alberta government's 1918 Venereal Diseases Act (VDA), by forcing prostitutes to undergo health exams, brought about the diagnosis of a number of infections within Edmonton's prostitute community that may have otherwise been left untreated. Most of the infected women subsequently received free medical treatment.[58] Although the validity of targeting prostitutes as primary agents of the transmission of venereal diseases has not necessarily been proven, the VDA is one example of legislation that did help prostitutes mitigate the dangers they faced in their profession.

Canadian historians have been reluctant to accord prostitutes unqualified status as working-class women. That is, most historical works on prostitution argue that there were essential differences that acted as barriers and isolated prostitutes. The particular hazards that turn-of-the-century Toronto prostitutes faced in their profession, Lori Rotenburg argues, differentiated them from other working-class men and women, and put her subjects "on the fringes of society," not clearly members of the working class.[59] "Marginality" is indeed a recurring theme in studies of prostitution. Andrée Lévesque even explicitly states that prostitutes lived

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[58] For example, PAA, 83.1/420 (Middle Series), vagrancy, 1920; and PAA, 83.1/163 (New Series), keeping a disorderly house, 1937.

[59] Rotenburg, "The Wayward Worker," 53.

"marginalized in their separate world."[60] Only Judith Fingard has attacked the concept of marginality by examining prostitutes' relationships with the men and women with whom they interacted in Victorian Halifax.[61] In fact, prostitutes wove social connections that effectively mitigated the marginality their criminal status could have otherwise imposed. Given that prostitute activity in Edmonton occurred almost entirely within the parameters of the city's working-class community, the social relations that engaged Edmonton's prostitutes are worthy of a similar reconsideration. These women have already been shown to be multi-dimensional beings -- wives, lovers, mothers and workers -- and that complexity extended into their relationships with other men and women. Their interactions with their clients and fellow prostitutes, in particular, reveal much about prostitutes' interpersonal relationships and private lives.

Little is known about the male clients of prairie prostitutes. James Gray's depiction of them as young, unattached and sexually charged has already been discussed. Prostitutes are able to add a few more details. Ethnicity, for instance, which did not figure greatly in the prostitute community, appears to have been a factor in the client population. Two prostitutes claimed that they used

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[60] Lévesque, Making and Breaking the Rules, 135.

[61] Judith Fingard, The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax (Halifax 1993), 113.

connections in the Chinese community to conduct their trade, and catered to a number of Chinese clients.[62] One woman's pimp actually drove her to various Chinese restaurants and cafes around Alberta to solicit clients, many of whom were Chinese.[63] Kate S indicated that many of the men she serviced were Galician (Ukrainian).[64] Prostitutes often did not know the names of their clients but were conscious of their ethnic identities. Elsie S, for instance, identified her clients only as "coloured men."[65] Such men were also generally working class. Although prostitutes did not often use occupational labels, Josephine V, for one, indicated that many of her customers were "fellows hauling gravel."[66] Prostitutes also seemed to have serviced an out-of-town clientele, most notably farmers who were in the city for the day.[67]

Male clients of prostitution have been reduced to figures of sexual demand in Canadian historiography, perhaps because social reformers directed a great deal of invective against the "male sexual irresponsibility" that they saw as a major

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[62] PAA, 83.1/6543 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1929; and PAA, 83.1/9014 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1934.

[63] P.A.A., 83.1/9014 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1934.

[64] PAA, 83.1/3879 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

[65] PAA, 83.1/6047 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928.

[66] PAA, 83.1/5852 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

[67] CEA, RG11 C67 F7, City Police Department Report, 1929.

cause of prostitution.[68] S.W. Horrall, however, suggests that relationships between prostitutes and their clients "could go beyond sexual contact."[69] Certainly, Edmonton prostitutes suggest that the line between their personal and professional lives often became obscured. Harriet P, for instance, took her personal connections to her customers seriously. In her court testimony she emphasized that her clients "weren't men off the streets, but other friends."[70] Lillie H also implied that a man who was her customer one night could also be a social companion at a downtown shooting gallery on a subsequent evening.[71] Because prostitutes and their clients shared a common social environment, their roles in each other's lives overlapped. Prostitutes did not see men simply as potential clients, but looked for male companionship in non-sexual situations, as well. Edna C, for instance, was adamant that she would not have relations with men while she had a "dose" (venereal disease). At the same time, however, she enjoyed socializing with the men who came into the bar where she worked, and who, in healthy times, she would have sexually serviced. Pragmatism, and economic survival, also entered her consideration. Because Edna sold drinks on

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[68] Pederson, "Building Today," 230-31.

[69] S.W. Horrall, "The (Royal) North-West Mounted Police and Prostitution on the Canadian Prairies," Prairie Forum 10, 1 (1985): 125.

[70] PAA, 83.1/3526 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

[71] PAA, 83.1/3503 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

percentage, it was to her benefit if she befriended the bar's customers and persuaded them to drink.[72] Prostitutes thus encountered men in both intimate and social situations, in private and public contexts.

Male clients of prostitutes were not looking only for sexual outlets; they sometimes looked to prostitutes simply for social companionship. Alice S's encounters with her clients certainly create the impression that her customers also wanted social companions. One man took Alice to a dance before having sexual relations with her, while another took her to a picture show after they had had intercourse.[73] If these men had been looking for purely sexual encounters, there would have been no reason for them to take Alice to social venues, since the woman had made it clear she was a prostitute. The sexual desires of clients were not always distinct from their emotional attachments, either. One soldier appeared to be besotted with an Edmonton prostitute. In fact, Lily M's husband found letters the client wrote to his wife from the military barracks in Calgary. Sexually explicit, they expressed the soldier's eagerness to be in the woman's company again, and indicated that he and Lily were engaged in a mutual correspondence.[74] Although most

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[72] PAA, 83.1/420 (Middle Series), vagrancy, 1920.

[73] CEA, RG11, C17, F1-3, statement to the Edmonton Police Department, 1929.

[74] PAA, 83.1/5670 (Old Series), vagrancy, 1917.

prostitutes and clients did not form such passionate attachments to each other, Lily's case demonstrates that relations could become highly complex.

Some historical studies of prostitution argue that prostitutes developed a solidarity among themselves that supported them in the face of external threats.[75] Other scholars argue that the nature of the profession precluded any kind of cooperation, as prostitutes competed to meet the demands of the same "market."[76] In Edmonton, neither "solidarity" nor "competition" accurately describes the way that prostitutes related to each other. How much genuine fellowship existed among prostitutes is debatable. The most common kind of relationship that is evident from the records occurred between a new recruit and a more experienced prostitute. Lillie H's story is a prime example. She first met Liz R at a clothes shop, and when the two women encountered each other again at a shooting gallery, they struck up an acquaintanceship. Liz invited Lillie to room with her, and her motives soon became clear when Liz asked Lillie if she was a "sporting" girl. Though she declined initially, Lillie eventually allowed Liz to introduce her to her pimp. After that, the two women began to work together

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[75] The best example is Fingard, Dark Side of Life, 113. Levesque, Making and Breaking the Rules, 133 also offers an intriguing view of solidarity among the madams who ran Montreal's brothels.

[76] Rotenburg, "The Wayward Worker," 54.

soliciting customers. Liz eventually found herself facing a criminal charge for helping to procuring Lillie.[77]

Other women also shared complicity in the recruitment and "training" of new prostitutes, but it is unclear how competitive prostitutes felt towards new recruits, especially if the prostitutes did not have to solicit customers themselves. Dorothy I testified that she was pressured into prostituting by a female friend she had known in Tofield. When Dorothy was asked if she "wanted to make five dollars" and refused, the friend told her, "Well, we do it all the time. If you want to be our friend you will have to do it too."[78] There is a definite implication in prostitutes' statements that they did not approach new recruits at their own instigation, and after new women had joined the profession, most of their orders came from male procurers. Alberta P's procurer put her in charge of training Alice S, instructing the latter to go to Alberta with questions about how to solicit and how much to charge clients. All of Alberta's dealings with Alice came at their pimp's instigation. When Alice became infected with a venereal disease, the procurer gave Alberta money to buy the treatment that the woman needed.[79] This was not solidarity; rather, the

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[77] PAA, 83.1/3535 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

[78] PAA, 83.1/7184 (Middle Series), procuring, 1929.

[79] CEA, RG11, C17, F1-3, statement to the Edmonton Police Department, 1929.

relationship between the two prostitutes was typical of many that were essentially arranged by procurers.

Some prostitutes did have a genuine affinity for each other which was often evinced in partnerships. Ruth S, Alberta W and Katie R, for example, rented a house together and ran it as a brothel. Ruth apparently brought the two other women together, having known Katie for four years and Alberta for one. All three denied being prostitutes, and their disavowal paid off: the charges against them were dismissed.[80] The court records indicate that many women had some kind of professional attachment to each other; between 1907 and 1910, for instance, the same groups of women are consistently charged together. One example is the case of Bonnie R, Mona B, Mandy D and Bessie B: charged together as inmates of a particular disorderly house in December 1909 and again in March 1910 for their presence in a different brothel.[81] Clear relationships between prostitutes who did not work together are rare. Mary L, for instance, identified Ruth E as both "a convicted prostitute" and her "only friend," but did not solicit with her. Since many prostitutes worked lawfully in factories, rooming houses and cafes, it seems likely that their lives would have overlapped in those settings, as well, but most women do not indicate that they

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[80] PAA, 83.1/4218 (Old Series), procuring, 1915.

[81] PAA, 83.1/1675 (Old Series), inmates of a bawdy house, 1909; and PAA, 83.1/1734 (Old Series), inmates of a bawdy house, 1910.

shared their lives substantially with any other prostitutes in a non-prostitution setting. The inevitable conclusion is that their shared profession was the focus of relations between prostitutes.

Prostitutes' integration with non-prostitute women presents an intriguing configuration within working-class society. Louise H, for instance, defended her prostitute friend May M when she was called to testify in the trial of May's pimp. Louise's testimony illustrates the acceptance many prostitutes received from "respectable" women in legitimate jobs:

> Q: Well you don't run around and make any money hustling? You live off your own earnings pretty well?
> A: Yes.
> Q: And you don't want to associate with girls who are doing that?
> A: It is not bad, if I find a girl like May. She has been a pal of mine, and I find her to be a nice girl.
> Q: So you wouldn't object to associating with a girl who was prostituting herself?
> A: No, I wouldn't.[82]

Ethel G displayed a similar sense of sympathy when she disclosed that she had encouraged her prostitute friend Minnie L to go back to Calgary when she learned how terrified the prostitute was of her pimp.[83] Prostitutes were clearly not necessarily ostracized by other working-class women.

Prostitution in Edmonton has been located in a specific

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[82] PAA, 83.1/6838 (Old Series), living on avails, 1918.

[83] PAA, 83.1/7308 (Old Series), living on avails, 1919.

physical and human environment. Prostitutes worked, lived and socialized within Edmonton's working-class community. Importantly, they were not segregated members of that community, but participated in it both in their specific capacity as prostitutes, and in more general ways as non-criminal workers, social companions and friends. If prostitution can be interpreted as a commercial manifestation of sexual relations within working-class society, it follows that prostitutes can be accorded status as representatives of the working class. But because prostitutes shared specific occupational experiences that were not common to other working-class women, they can also be said to have constituted a particular female subculture within Edmonton's working-class community.

Chapter 5

"I AM A GOOD GIRL": THE SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF EDMONTON'S PROSTITUTES

A 1937 article in the Canadian women's magazine, Chatelaine, offered this assessment of the prostitute's existence:

> Often she has had no good upbringing, no wholesome living. She drifts or is driven into that dark half-world that exists in every community, out of reach of good society. Once she knows she is ostracized, she hardens; everyone's hand is against her, and she is against society.[1]

This magazine piece illustrates the filter through which early twentieth-century middle-class commentators viewed prostitutes -- a framework which emphasized their lack of personal agency, their deviant behaviour, and their social ostracization. In their court testimony, Edmonton prostitutes offer a different construction of their lives altogether, one where they were not "against" or "outside" society but worked within its economic and social parameters. Far from feeling isolated, the women were interested in their larger surroundings, and able to articulate their own needs and aspirations. Prostitutes discussed the choices they made (based on their personal circumstances), their ideas and experiences of sexuality, their conceptions of human relations, and their interaction with the law. In the process, they show

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[1] Helen Norsworthy Sangster, "Women for Sale," Chatelaine (April 1937), 105.

prostitution to be both a result of conscious decision-making and an extension of normative behaviour.

There is no single question related to prostitution that received more attention from early twentieth-century Canadian reformers than the motivation of women entering the profession. Contemporary literature reveals the extent to which both difficult economic conditions and moral delinquency were held accountable as the primary reasons why women fell into prostitution. The prostitutes' stories, however, indicate that they were actually motivated by a complex combination of factors, including, but not limited to, financial need and personal beliefs.

All women had strong economic motivations for entering the work force in the first place. As Carolyn Strange has stressed, poverty drove the first generation of women to waged labour.[2] Even after obtaining employment, the economic constraints facing young women in the cities were considerable: job insecurity, low wages, costly living expenses. Prostitution became a means by which some women attempted to meet their financial needs. Eunice D, for instance, was left with two small children to support when her husband went to Vancouver to find work. Her explanation for why she became a prostitute was simple: "I was rather tight up for money at the time." Later, Eunice sold her sewing machine

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[2] Carolyn Strange, Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930 (Toronto 1995), 8.

and borrowed money from a friend so that she would no longer have to support her family as a prostitute.[3]

The amelioration of financial distress through short-term prostitution must have been a fairly common occurrence. Although social commentators in Edmonton did not distinguish between long-term and short-term prostitutes, investigators in other Canadian cities reported on the prevalence of "occasional prostitution."[4] This type of prostitution was threatening to authorities not only because it belied the myth of white slavery, but also because it underscored a seemingly incomprehensible notion of voluntary participation in prostitution by young women.[5] The oscillatory nature of the trade in Edmonton reveals that the profession was actually a way for young women to negotiate life in urban centres. Significantly, prostitutes themselves controlled their movements in and out of the profession, based on personal evaluations of their own circumstances. This element of personal control was admittedly not universal. Some prostitutes were reluctant participants in the profession,

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[3] PAA, 83.1/3538 (Middle Series), procuring, 1923.

[4] Social commentator C.S. Clark, for instance, considered occasional prostitution "one of the very serious...of the many phases of the social evil in Toronto"; Report of the Social Survey Commission of Toronto (Toronto 1915), 12. See also the concerns of Halifax city missionary John Grierson in Judith Fingard, The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax (Halifax 1993), 98-99.

[5] Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto 1991), 83.

forced by their husbands or male companions to solicit.[6] But a degree of choice is identifiable in most prostitutes' lives. At the same time, not all working women who faced financial survival in the city chose to alleviate those conditions through prostitution. Clearly, additional factors were involved in the decisions of women who did enter prostitution.

Some women deliberately pursued what they perceived to be a relatively lucrative livelihood. Josephine V, for instance, was told by her procurer that she could make more money "doing business than by working out." Her experiences as a prostitute confirmed this assessment. As a chambermaid she was paid twenty-two dollars a month plus board at the Selkirk Hotel, whereas as a prostitute, she made two dollars and fifty cents per client. Even with only one client per night, Josephine could more than treble her monthly wages as a hotel maid, although she would have to pay her own board.[7] "Doing business" was a common term for commercial sexual transactions, and many prostitutes viewed the trade as a business. Marie M had a particularly professional approach to prostitution. She admitted candidly in court that she had been a "bench hooker" working out of restaurants for five years, arranging all of her dates herself. Marie told a cafe owner who offered her employment as a waitress that she wanted

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[6] PAA, 83.1/3269 (Old Series), procuring, 1913; and PAA, 83.1/1987 (New Series), procuring, 1921.

[7] PAA, 83.1/5852 (Old Series), procuring, 1917.

to be able to use a room upstairs for prostitution. Even when presented with the opportunity to be legally employed, Marie clearly elected to work as a prostitute. She was also particular about how she engaged in the trade, proudly claiming that she had never worked "in a house," meaning a brothel.[8] Was Marie's pride in never having worked out of a brothel indicative of an internal hierarchy among prostitutes? None of the other women shed light on this aspect of the trade in Edmonton, but it is clear that it was important to Marie at least that she worked independently of pimp or madam. Other prostitutes were also able to exercise a certain independence in their lives through their trade. Although she worked with a pimp, Frances F kept track of all her transactions herself, recording both her income and her expenses in a black book that she kept in her purse.[9] To a degree, prostitutes exploited the profession for their own ends, as with the woman who confessed that she prostituted because she did not have to work as hard as she might at another job.[10] Like many women, she had higher expectations for herself than a life of menial labour.

The expectations that prostitutes brought with them to urban centres present an interesting line of inquiry. Women who had already worked as prostitutes in other cities could

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[8] PAA, 83.1/4088 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

[9] PAA, 83.1/9014 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1934.

[10] PAA, 83.1/3045 (Old Series), procuring, 1913.

not have been unaware of the economic conditions or choices that awaited them in Edmonton, that could lead them to prostitution again. But regardless, the lure of city lights proved overwhelming. Florence M stated that although she ended up working as a prostitute in Edmonton, she would sooner live in the city than return to her father's farm.[11] Although most prostitutes moved to Edmonton initially to find legitimate work, many felt compelled to stay because of the lifestyle they were able to enjoy. Bars, shooting galleries, dance halls, theatres -- women, like men, were drawn to these places of amusement, and prostitution often became an extension of the urban lifestyle. Lily M, for instance, initially sought only to socialize with soldiers, finding their company "gay." When she realized that the men would pay to have sexual relations with her, she began to conduct transactions with them. Her court testimony indicates that she did not cease to view the soldiers or the city as opportunities for purely social encounters, however.[12] The line between lifestyle and work was fine indeed, to the extent of being obscured at times. The motivation for prostitution cannot be understood as a purely financial concern when women also brought with them to the city a host of social expectations and ambitions, some of which were fulfilled through prostitution.

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[11] PAA, 83.1/3978 (Middle Series), procuring, 1924.

[12] PAA, 83.1/5670 (Old Series), prostitution, 1917.

Sexual pathology was often identified by contemporary commentators as another factor which influenced the entry of women into the profession. Reformers classified female criminals as either "good" or "bad" women on the basis of their sexual, as well as criminal, conduct. Emily Murphy would often note in her correspondence if a woman was "good" or "bad." In one instance, she said of a woman she thought to be engaging in promiscuous sexual relations, "I have no doubt she is a bad girl."[13] The term "prostitution" itself became less a criminal designation than a representation of the censure of a variety of consensual sexual arrangements between men and women, many of which did not involve some form of payment.[14] As Angela Carter contends, the middle-class moral code determined that "to be a wayward girl [had] something to do with pre-marital sex; to be a wicked woman [had] something to do with adultery."[15] Based on the standards of pre-marital sexual activity and adultery, prostitutes could have been both "wayward" and "wicked," but were they different from other females of their class, or indeed other women in general? Was promiscuity, in fact, the hallmark of the prostitute?

To describe the behaviour of all prostitutes before they entered the profession as categorically promiscuous would be

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[13] CEA, M62 F10, Emily Murphy Magisterial Papers, letter to J.R. Boyle, 22 September 1920.

[14] Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water, 83.

[15] Angela Carter, "Introduction," in Wayward Girls and Wicked Women, ed. Angela Carter (London 1986), x.

unfair. The prostitutes in this Edmonton study illustrate that sexual relations presented an ambiguous and complex concern in their lives, both before and during their tenures as prostitutes. Although sexual initiation came early to most of the women, the women exhibited a range of attitudes towards and experiences of sexuality. Like sixteen-year-old Anna B, who admitted that she had had sexual intercourse "with a certain friend down home" before coming to Edmonton from Kenaston, Saskatchewan,[16] most prostitutes had become sexually active at a young age. Not all women indicate that their pre-prostitution sexual experiences were voluntary or pleasant. Maud L, for instance, revealed that the one time she "had connection" in her hometown of Prince Rupert, she had been forced by a boy she knew.[17] Furthermore, a substantial minority of prostitutes were virginal before joining the profession: Lillie H, for instance, stated that "there was one boy who tried to get it against me and I hit him in the face."[18] Other women revelled in their sexual exploits. Lily M carefully preserved the "love letters" written to her by one of her soldier-clients. Policeman James Irvine called the letters the "filthiest" he had ever seen. They were certainly explicit, and put to rest any notions of timid or restrained

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[16] PAA, 83.1/205A (Middle Series), living on avails, 1920.

[17] PAA, 83.1/4198, keeping a bawdy house, 1915. See also, PAA, 83.1/3269 (Old Series), procuring, 1913.

[18] PAA, 83.1/3535 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

sexual relations:

> Well you tell me you are getting plenty of tail for love. Well I guess you are alright, there is no doubt about that. I tell you what I think. You could keep us two busy screwing you. What do you think? Well I would like to be on top off you now having a dam good screw. You sure can do it all right, standing up or lying.[19]

Not all prostitutes were comfortable with such explicit sexual talk. Lillian L had to be given a piece of paper by the prosecutor upon which to write down her activities, because she did not want to talk about them aloud.[20]

What prostitutes understood as constituting "morality" is central to the discussion of their social consciousness. Pleading non-consent or previous sexual inexperience might certainly have been a strategy prostitutes used to make their conduct seem more compatible with what they understood to be prevailing ideas about acceptable conduct, but it is then striking that more women did not categorically deny that they had accumulated sexual experience before arriving in Edmonton or entering prostitution. Although Crown prosecutors often invited prostitutes to admit that they had "misbehaved," few of the women acknowledged the term. Some women were aware of the prescriptive attitudes towards sexuality that informed the laws which were applied against them. Both Ollie S and Ollie C, for instance, testified that their mothers had told them

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[19] PAA, 83.1/5670 (Old Series), prostitution, 1917.

[20] PAA, 83.1/6340 (Middle Series), procuring, 1928.

that it was wrong to have connection with men before marriage.[21] A few women also expressed remorse for their conduct and vowed to "get out of the life."[22] Maggie T, in fact, insisted that the charge against her had been mislaid, because she had reformed since she had last been convicted of prostitution in 1917: "Four years I was a good girl."[23]

In contrast, other women felt perfectly entitled to have a sexual life, including a sexual past. Jeanie C even admonished the crown prosecutor that what she had done before she was married was neither his business nor her husband's. Apparently Jeanie felt that her marital conduct was not her husband's concern either, because she also confessed to having cheated on him in Vancouver and becoming pregnant with the other man's child.[24] Many women admitted freely to adultery -- particularly those who were separated from their husbands -- indicating that monogamy was not necessarily a value they held or felt obligated to practice. Eunice D, for instance, whose husband was away looking for work, had an affair with George G, a man who later became her pimp.[25] Another woman was also

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[21] PAA, 83.1/3045 (Old Series), procuring, 1913.

[22] PAA, 83.1/7542 (Old Series), living on avails, 1919.

[23] PAA, 83.1/5621 (Old Series), vagrancy, 1917; and PAA, 83.1/1157 (Middle Series), keeping a bawdy house, 1920.

[24] P.A.A., 83.1 (Middle Series), 4898, living on avails, 1926.

[25] PAA, 83.1/3538 (Middle Series), procuring, 1923. See also, for instance, PAA, 83.1/ 6396 (Old Series), living on avails, 1918; and PAA, 83.1/698 (New Series), living on

apparently unconcerned that her husband, from whom she was separated, knew that she was a prostitute.[26] Clearly, some prostitutes determined for themselves what was acceptable conduct.

Edmonton prostitutes' sexual behaviour was not out of line with the normative practices of other turn-of-the-century Canadian women, either. The prevalence of pre-marital sexual activity, for instance, is asserted by Karen Dubinsky who uses seduction case files in Ontario to show that "young men and women were relatively free to pursue a relationship that included a sexual component" before marriage.[27] Moreover, she contends that pre-marital sexual activity was not simply an urban phenomenon. Young rural women were also able to make choices regarding their sexual lives.[28] In light of the fact that many Edmonton prostitutes had their first sexual encounters in their rural communities, it is likely that their early sexual initiation, rather than constituting deviant behaviour, represented their participation in the subculture of their peers. If historians are demonstrating that early twentieth-century women in Canada were generally sexually

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avails, 1938.

[26] PAA, 83.1/1036 (New Series), living on avails, 1939.

[27] Karen Dubinsky, "'Maidenly Girls' or 'Designing Women'? The Crime of Seduction in Turn-of-the-Century Ontario," in Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History, ed. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto 1992), 44.

[28] Ibid., 54.

active, then early sexual activity was not the exclusive domain of the prostitute. Moreover, the nature of sexual relations between men and women in both rural and urban areas often seemed to involve an element of exchange that strongly resembled prostitution. Frances Swyripa, for instance, suggests that girls in the Ukrainian bloc in east-central Alberta used their sexuality to secure anything from treats like oranges and ribbons to money. She explains that "casual sex was perhaps the only way for girls to acquire money and goods independently of the family."[29] According to Dubinsky, rural Ontario women also offered sexual services in exchange for companionship and entertainment.[30] In cities, it had become common to find women trading an evening of dancing or a movie for sexual activity.[31] Prostitution might then be seen as part of continuum and institutionalization of sexual arrangements that existed in early twentieth-century Canada, rather than as a departure from the norm of such relations.

Significantly, other working-class women in Edmonton did not always draw distinctions between their own conduct and that of prostitutes. When Louise H testified as a witness in the trial of her friend May M's pimp, she resisted the Crown

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[29] Frances Swyripa, "Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Ukrainian Bloc Settlement: East-Central Alberta Between the Wars," Prairie Forum 20, 2 (Fall 1995): 157.

[30] Dubinsky, "'Maidenly Girls' or 'Designing Women'?" 55.

[31] Tamara Myers, "Women Policing Women: A Patrol Woman in Montreal in the 1920s," Journal of the Canadian Historical Association 4 (1993): 232.

prosecutor's attempts to whitewash her own conduct:

> Q: Your idea of a nice girl is one that behaves herself? You behave yourself?
> A: I wouldn't say that I do all the time.
> Q: But you don't run around with men all the time?
> A: Occasionally I do.
> Q: But not for immoral purposes?
> A: I wouldn't say that either.
> Q: So you wouldn't say that you don't?
> A: No.[32]

In the above case a witness who was not a prostitute was asked to reinforce the impression that prostitutes behaved abnormally. Instead, she confirmed that there was an affinity between the sexual conduct of prostitutes and other working-class women, especially in the attempt to control their own sexual destinies.

Edmonton prostitutes not only made choices regarding their sexual lives, they also took steps to protect themselves from the consequences of those choices. Specifically, the use of contraceptive techniques was both a common practice among prostitutes, and made a normative element of prostitution through professional instruction. Contraception was an important area where prostitutes could share their knowledge and try to protect each other, much the way birth control information was shared within the general population of women.[33] By practising and discussing contraceptive

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[32] PAA, 83.1/6838 (Old Series), living on avails, 1918.

[33] The classic study on the history of contraception in Canada remains Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980 (Toronto 1986).

procedures, prostitutes indicate both an awareness of the general dangers of pregnancy and venereal disease for women presented by sexual activity, as well as the increased danger they faced as a result of repeated exposure to those hazards. The techniques themselves were often rudimentary and their effectiveness is debatable, but the fact that they were transmitted in the first place is significant. Lillie H's reluctance to join the profession, for example, stemmed from her fear of becoming pregnant. The woman who introduced her to prostitution reassured Lillie by training her how to "wash herself out."[34] Douching was a regular practice for prostitutes after sexual intercourse (in one case, a woman lent a fellow prostitute her douche).[35] Many prostitutes were also conscientious about maintaining personal hygiene programmes, and some regularly visited health clinics.[36] One woman claimed to refrain from sexual activity altogether when she had a "dose."[37] Prostitutes clearly tried to take care of themselves, and in the process exercise personal control in their lives.

Thus far prostitution has been shown to reflect attempts by some working-class women to fulfil and express their needs and aspirations. The degree of personal agency they displayed

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[34] PAA, 83.1/3535 (Old Series), procuring, 1914.

[35] PAA, 83.1/7184 (Middle Series), procuring, 1929.

[36] PAA, 83.1/1036 (New Series), living on avails, 1939.

[37] PAA, 83.1/420 (Middle Series), vagrancy, 1920.

belies the idea that prostitutes saw themselves as subordinates or deviants. Instead, these women felt comfortable making demands of the people around them -- including their male companions, pimps and lawyers -- demonstrating a well-developed sense of self-possession and importance. Their personal relationships, in particular, often became arenas for negotiating power. Just as monogamy was a value that many prostitutes eschewed in their private as well as work lives, the bonds and boundaries of marriage itself were continually challenged as married and unmarried prostitutes alike attempted to assert authority over their male partners and their own well-being. As Marilyn Wood Hill observed in her study of prostitution in nineteenth-century New York, "many prostitutes may have married for the same reasons they had entered prostitution -- it was a practical way to cope with the issues of everyday life."[38] When marriage itself became a problem, Edmonton prostitutes displayed a marked readiness to sever the union. Mamie S, for instance, left her husband "because he treated me mean...and kicked me around." She further reinforced her contempt for the man by burning her marriage license.[39] This act need not be perceived as an impotent gesture of anger; it could equally be seen as a symbolic assertion of independence.

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[38] Marilyn Wood Hill, Their Sisters' Keepers: Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1870 (Berkeley 1993), 289.

[39] PAA, 83.1/3073 (Old Series), living on avails, 1913.

Independence is a concept that must be treated carefully. Most prostitutes were reliant to some degree on a relationship with a man, financially or emotionally. But they did attempt to manage their relationships according to their own priorities and beliefs. Even those women who enjoyed good relations with their male companions did not always choose to marry them. Maggie T boasted that she could marry her male companion of four years anytime she wanted, but preferred to remain single. At the same time, however, she highly valued her relationship with the man.[40] Even though prostitutes did not necessarily consider marriage the most important feature of their lives, the fact that almost all of the women were participants in some kind of marital arrangement, be it formal or common-law, shows that they "attempted to find security and stability in permanent relationships."[41] In addition, the different perspectives that prostitutes had on the institution of marriage should be seen as indicative of the way that women in general had started to claim some latitude in their relationships with men in the early twentieth century.

The most striking illustration of how prostitutes asserted authority in their lives is found in their approach to the legal system. Although certainly entitled to feel some fear or apprehension in the legal sphere as the targets of

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[40] PAA, 83.1 (Middle Series), 1157, keeping a bawdy house, 1920.

[41] Anne M. Butler, Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West (Urbana 1985), 26.

some of the most stringent of early twentieth-century laws, prostitutes often drew clear boundaries around what they considered their personal affairs and loyalties. When Helen M was asked how she got her customers, she hedged her answer: "There are numerous ways, and I don't want to involve too many people."[42] Another woman was even bolder when called as a witness against her pimp husband, telling the defence attorney that he had no right to question her about her pre-marital activities because she had been a free woman then. The lawyer then asked her, "You did as you liked then, and believed in doing as you liked?" -- to which the woman replied, "I did, and you would not stop me either."[43]

Prostitutes consistently called upon the law to protect or enforce their interests. Emma S, for instance, asked police to lay a procuring charge against the man who brought her to Edmonton, because he had promised to find her a job in the city and had coerced her into prostitution instead.[44] Other prostitutes tried to keep their pimps in line by calling or threatening to call the police. Bessie B, for instance, told the court that her pimp "demanded a little more of me than I thought he should have, and it got to such a serious point that I had to call in the police."[45] Law enforcement

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[42] PAA, 83.1/1036 (New Series), living on avails, 1939.

[43] PAA, 83.1/4898 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1926.

[44] PAA, 83.1 (Old Series), 6001, procuring, 1917.

[45] PAA, 83.1/3997 (Old Series), living on avails, 1914.

officials were also brought in as revenge for mistreatment. In several cases, prostitutes reported abuse after being beaten by their pimps, but they rarely used police involvement as a way actually to escape prostitution. More typical was the scenario Anne D outlined:

> In fact, I was drinking; he slapped me. I called him names on the street -- I was drinking that night. I got so mad at him, I was just willing to do anything, put him in gaol or whatever it was. I was awful mad at him for slapping me, that is what happened.[46]

The fact that Edmonton prostitutes felt entitled to legal protection is crucial to understanding how they saw themselves in relation to the rest of society. By asserting their legal rights as citizens, prostitutes articulated quite clearly that they did not consider themselves marginalized or inferior. Furthermore, even when confronted with what reformers considered the debilitating twin conditions of poverty and precocious sexuality, the women exercised choice in their lives. The choices were often limited, and displayed little qualitative differences at times; the life of an unmarried prostitute, for instance, was not necessarily less constrained than that of a married woman. Neither did most prostitutes revel in their profession. The fact that a woman could view fourteen years of imprisonment with hard labour as an alternative to prostitution with equanimity underlines that

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[46] PAA, 83.1/698 (New Series), living on avails, 1938. See also PAA, 83.1/3879 (Old Series), procuring, 1914; and PAA, 83.1/4898 (Middle Series), living on avails, 1926.

prostitution was a hard life.[47] Life in early twentieth-century Edmonton could be harsh for working-class women in general, though, and, for women to whom the city was mecca, prostitution was sometimes the only avenue they could find to negotiate themselves a place.

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[47] PAA, 83.1/7184 (Middle Series), procuring, 1929.

CONCLUSION

When a prostitute was called to the stand in early twentieth-century Edmonton's police court, the immediacy of her situation likely weighed most heavily on her mind: would she pass unscathed through this moment of legal encounter? Like most historical subjects, she would not have realized, or perhaps even cared, that many years later historians would measure and probe her words for insight into the past. Yet her testimony recalled more than a naive country girl's sexual misadventures in the city. The choices that she confronted -- as a woman, as a worker, as a migrant -- ultimately speak to the broader issues facing a society poised at the juncture between evolution and transformation. The Edmonton prostitute was at the vanguard of early twentieth-century Canadians exploring the frontier of the city, their consciousnesses, while shaped to some degree by the conditions and experiences of rural life, eventually refracted by the urban prism.

Prostitution, when contemplated through the concepts of work and sexuality by which the profession is defined, shows that city life engendered a modification, perhaps even a translation, of established behaviours. The working woman was not an urban phenomenon, and the Edmonton prostitute's search for employment in the city was in keeping with the expectations placed on many farm girls at the turn of the century. But even though young rural women might have grown

up expecting to work outside the home, the harsh working conditions combined with the high cost of living in Edmonton often forced them to confront choices they likely did not anticipate. Prostitution became a way to supplement their meager incomes, to gain a degree of control over their labour, even to find a niche within the city's working-class community. Similarly, the urban lifestyle did not introduce most prostitutes to sexual activity, but rather provided them with opportunities to explore a fuller spectrum of sexual relations. Rural sexuality was not without its own particular modes of exchange, and prostitution in Edmonton was, at least in part, an extension of the informal transactions with which country girls would have been familiar. The city did, however, constitute a relatively unregulated environment where young men and women could mix freely, and many women took advantage of such latitude by converting informal sexual exchange into the more formal trade of prostitution. Nevertheless, the social boundaries of rural versus urban conduct remained fluid throughout the early twentieth-century.

Having established the broader significance of Edmonton prostitutes' experiences, the historian is left wondering about what became of these intriguing individuals. Some, no doubt, moved on to another city and further periods of their lives may be preserved in other public documents. Other prostitutes perhaps stayed in Edmonton, swallowed up in the ranks of the city's working women, while still more probably

returned to their rural homes, their urban sojourns complete. In the end, all that may ever be known about any of these women is that each had her moment -- however brief -- in the social theatre that was early twentieth-century Edmonton.

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